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Better Gut Health

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The science behind the symptoms

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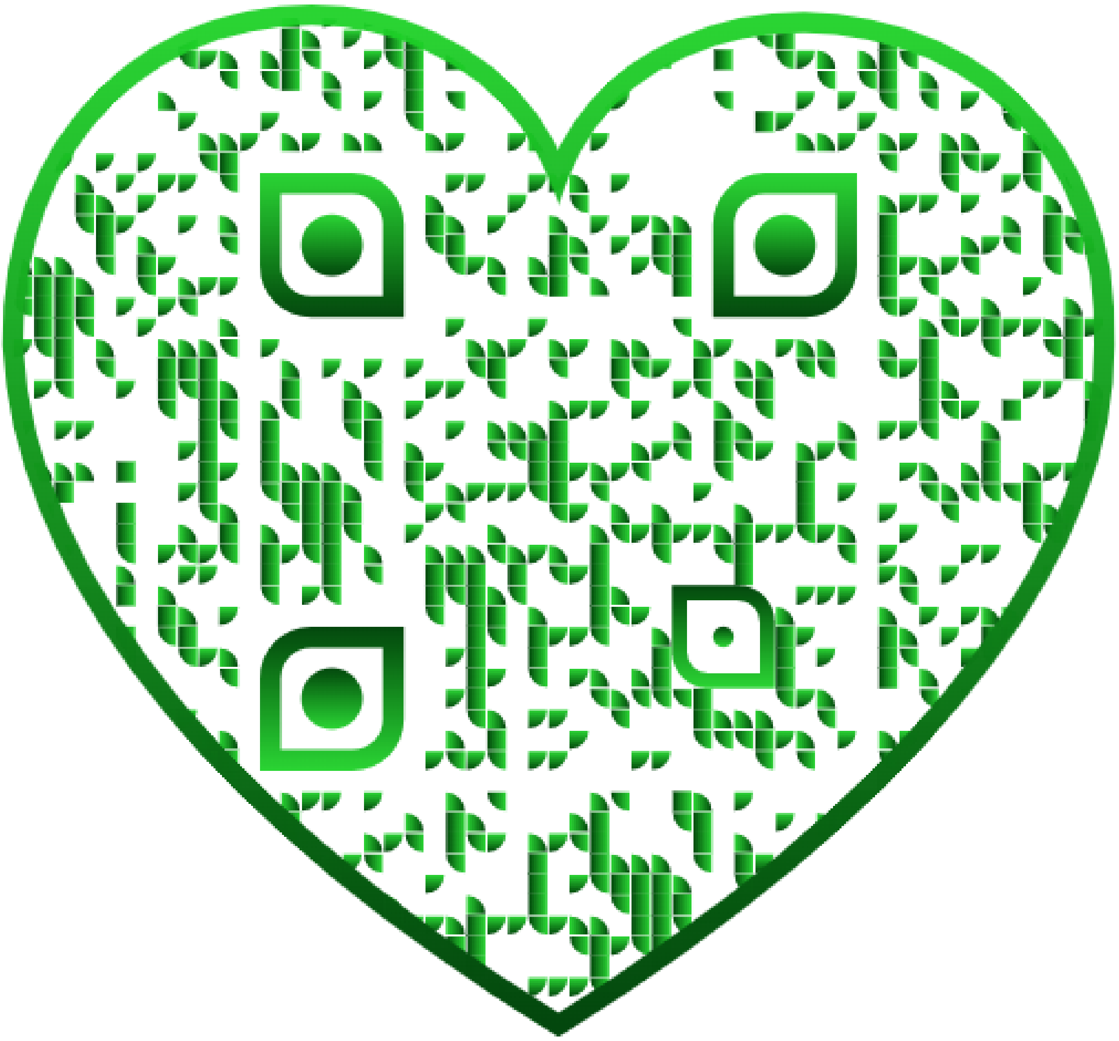

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Welcome

You've just picked up the most important investment in your health this year. Your gut is more than just where your food goes: it's the powerhouse of your entire wellbeing, and we owe it to ourselves to look after it – starting today.

If we look after our guts, we're looking after our brains, our mental health, our ability to fight illness, our mood, our energy, and even our longevity. And all of that is worth 30 Days of your time, right?

With *30 Days To Better Gut Health*, we will guide you through 30 simple actions you can take to nourish your gut, from delicious ingredients to mindful practices. Over the course of a month, we'll show you how you can build them into lifelong habits. Alongside these 30 actions there are 30 simple gut-friendly recipes, too!

In 30 Days you could be feeling the benefits of better gut health: let's get started!

Esther

Editor
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Hello!

Esther is also the editor of *Women's Running* magazine, which focuses on health, fitness and wellbeing: check it out if you run, or you'd like to!

30 DAYS TO Better Gut Health

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Anthem's purpose is to help people lead happier, healthier lives. As part of this, since 2019 Anthem has donated over £78,000 to charities connected with mental health, food banks, community projects and international aid.

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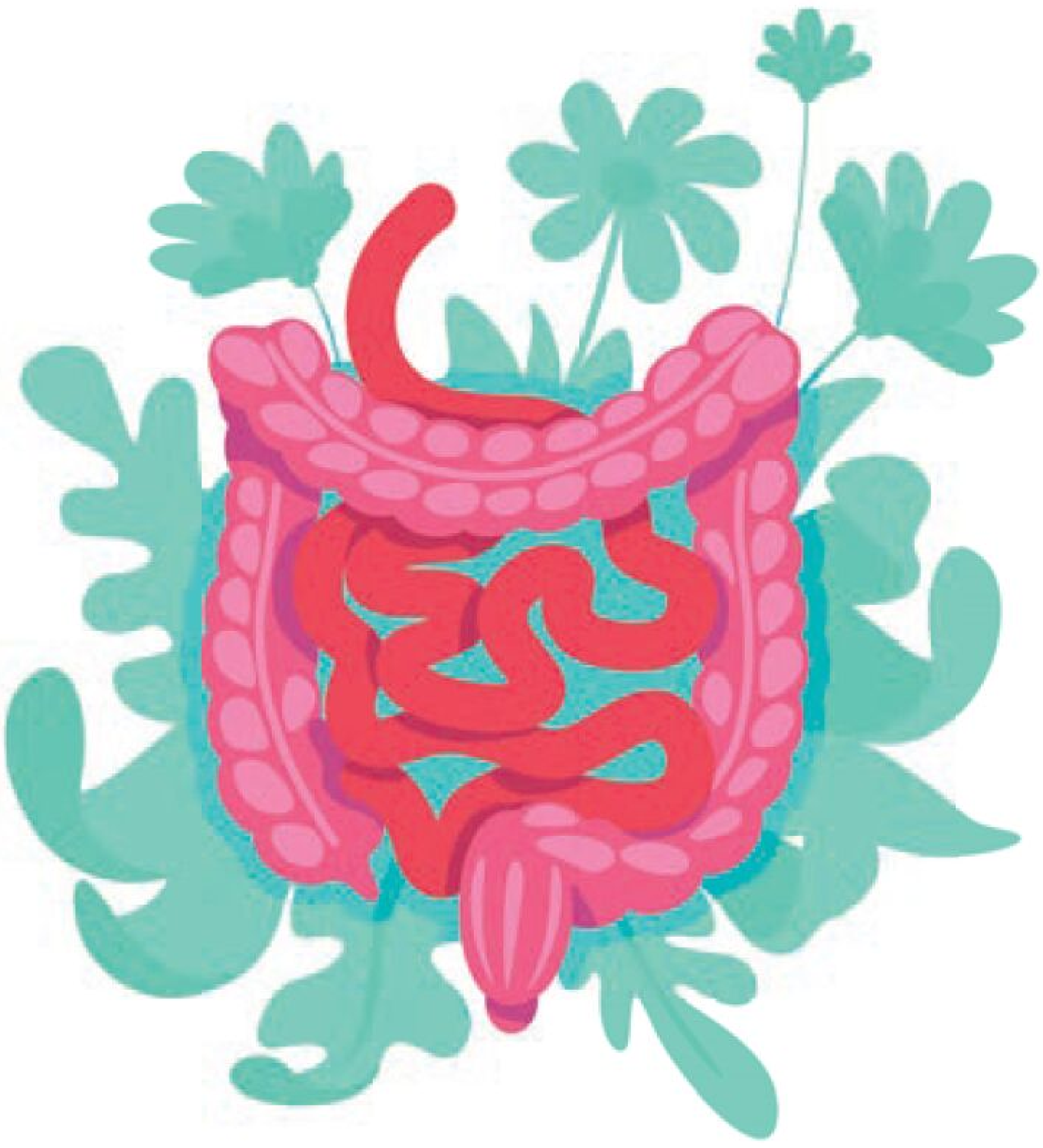

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GUT FLORA

Getting to know your gut

Words: Dr Juliet McGrattan

Let's start at the beginning: what is the gut, what does it do, and how do we know if something's wrong?

Your gut includes the whole of your gastrointestinal system. It starts at your mouth and ends at your anus and it's about nine metres long. It forms a continuous passageway that includes the main organs of digestion, namely the stomach, small intestine, and large intestine.

The gastrointestinal tract (GI tract) contains the gut microbiota, with some 1,000 different strains of bacteria having diverse roles in the maintenance of immune health and metabolisms.

Its main function is to digest the food that you eat, take the nutrients and energy out of it and supply them to the rest of your body. It also excretes waste from the body which it packages it up into your poo.

In recent years it's become clear that the gut is very much more than just food digestion and waste excretion, but it also plays a crucial role in the overall function of the body. Having a healthy gut is a vital key to having good general health.

A trip along the digestive tract

Following a piece of food through the gastrointestinal tract can help to give us a good understanding of the different parts of the gut.

The time it takes for food to move right through the body varies hugely. It depends on the type of food and your individual digestion. The whole process can be as quick as 12 hours, but it may take up to five days for some foods to make their way along the entire tract.

WHY IS GUT HEALTH IMPORTANT?

It's essential to look after your gut. Having a healthy gut will mean you can:

- ✓ Get the nutrients and energy your body needs to function
- ✓ Effectively excrete harmful waste products from your body
- ✓ Maintain a healthy gut microbiome
- ✓ Lower your risk of other long-term medical conditions
- ✓ Reduce your risk of contracting bowel cancer
- ✓ Have a regular and manageable bowel habit
- ✓ Easily spot changes in your gut that might indicate disease
- ✓ Feel more in control of the gut-brain connection and your mental health

Investing time and energy into looking after your gut will have huge rewards, both now and in the future.

When things go wrong...

With so many players involved in the gut it's easy to see why sometimes things don't work as they should. Understanding the normal process helps you to understand how different problems might affect you. If food isn't travelling smoothly through the oesophagus you might get indigestion. If the stomach is over-producing acid, that can damage the stomach lining and give you pain or stomach ulcers.

If the sphincter at the bottom of the oesophagus doesn't close properly, then stomach acids might reflux into your oesophagus and give you heartburn. Similarly, if you have inflammation of the lining of the bowel such as in Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, it's easy to see how that can affect the way your body absorbs nutrients and water.

Talking to your doctor about your bowels

All of us will experience symptoms from our gut at some point in our lives. Gut conditions are very common, for example, around one in five adults have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a condition that causes pain, bloating and a change in bowel habit. Bowel habits can feel very personal and remain a taboo topic, but we need to get comfortable talking about them so that we don't miss important conditions such as bowel cancer.

Getting a diagnosis early can save your life. Remember, your doctor is very used to conversations about bodily functions and won't bat an eyelid when you talk about your poo. In fact, they want to hear about it. Don't put off going to your doctor because you feel embarrassed.

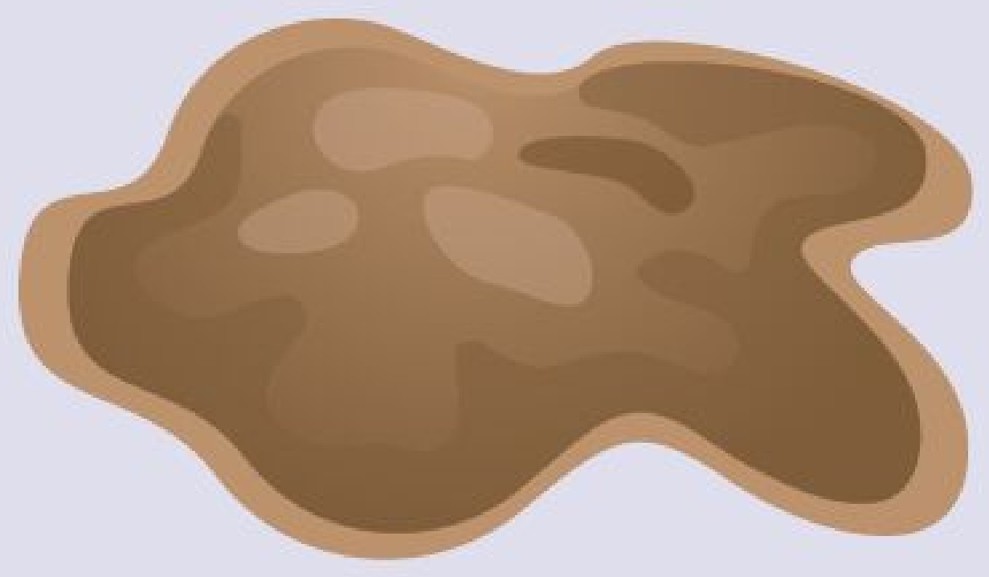
It's more than just digestion

Have you ever had a feeling in your gut about something? This sensation just highlights that the gut doesn't function alone. Feeling nervous can give you diarrhoea, feeling stressed can make you feel sick, while a stomach rumble makes you feel hungry. The brain and gut are communicating all the time and an issue in one affects the other.

Other body systems are intertwined with the gut too such as your immune system. Even your bone health can be affected, as oestrogen influences how much calcium is absorbed from your gut and calcium is needed for healthy bones. For women, getting diarrhoea linked to your menstrual period or developing constipation in menopause are examples of how hormones can cause gut problems.

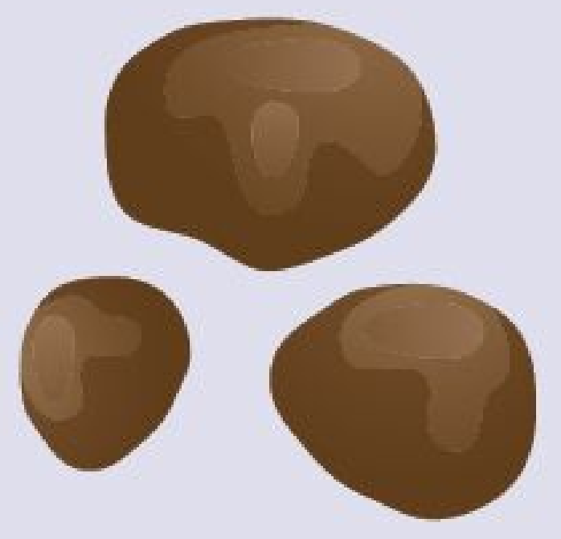
IS YOUR POO NORMAL?

Spot the signs of potential health issues with regular poo checks



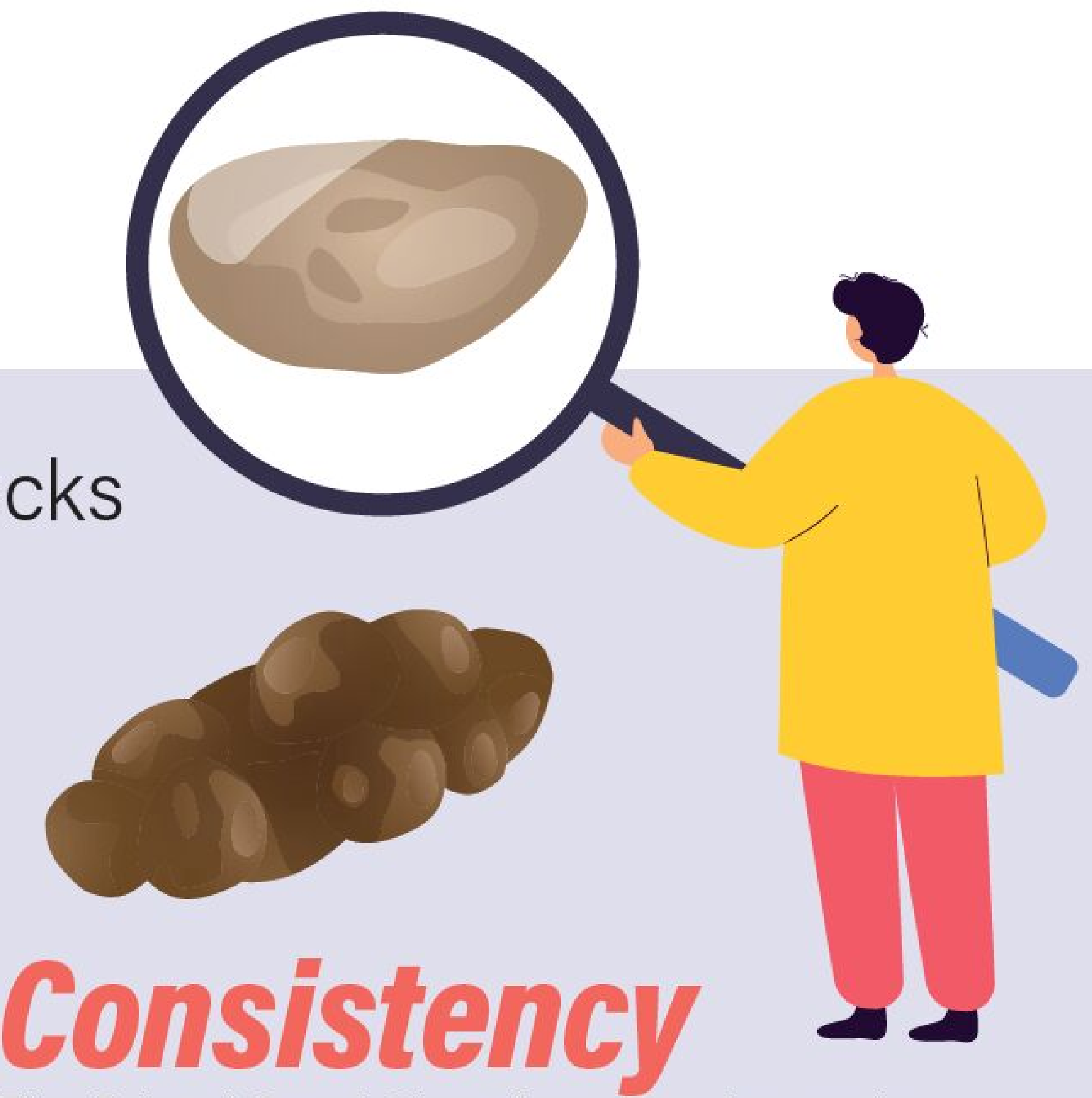
Colour

Poo colour is influenced by what you eat, but essentially it should be brown. Black stools can indicate blood loss. Very pale stools can be a sign of liver disease, while green stools may suggest infection. Red poo can indicate fresh blood loss; the blood may be on the surface or mixed in with the poo. Speak to your GP if you notice any of these changes.



Smell

No poo smells great and certain food such as broccoli or eggs can make it more stinky than usual, but really offensive smelling poo could be a sign that something's not right. Infections or constipation can result in very smelly poo. Medical conditions such as coeliac disease or IBS make poo smell bad, although this is not usually the only sign.



Consistency

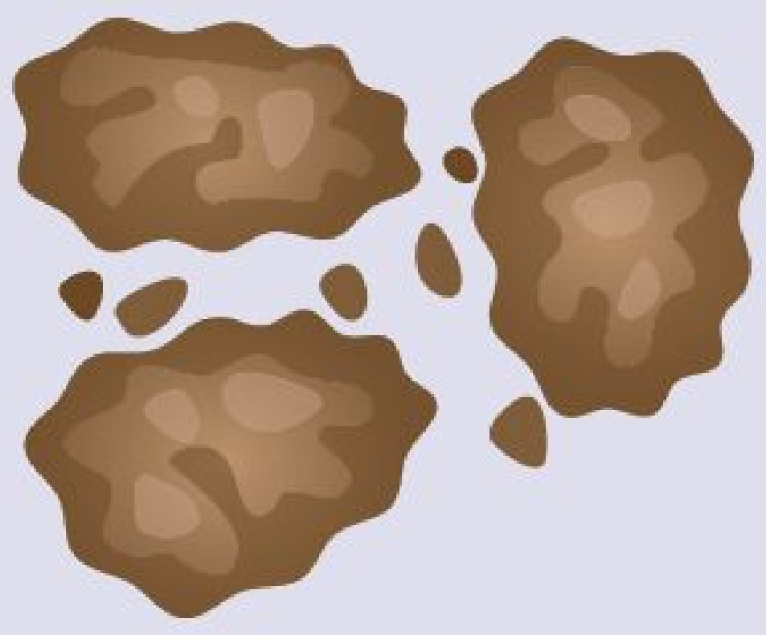
The Bristol Stool Chart is a popular scale of poo description. We should be aiming for stools of type 3 or 4 which are sausage shaped (find out more on page 36). Small or watery stools are not ideal, neither are pellets or large, hard to pass poo. Poo should sink to the bottom of the toilet bowl. Mucousy or greasy stools can be a sign of an underlying bowel condition.

What's the gut microbiome?

Bacteria, viruses and fungi have a bad name. We automatically think of disease, but having a diverse and healthy population of these in our gut is essential for good gut health. Your gut microbiome is the community of microbes in your gut. Not only is it a perfect place for them to live, but they ensure our gut functions at its optimum. They help with digestion of food, support our immune system by getting rid of harmful bacteria and influence the gut-brain connection. We're just at the beginning of understanding the role of the gut microbiome in our overall health.

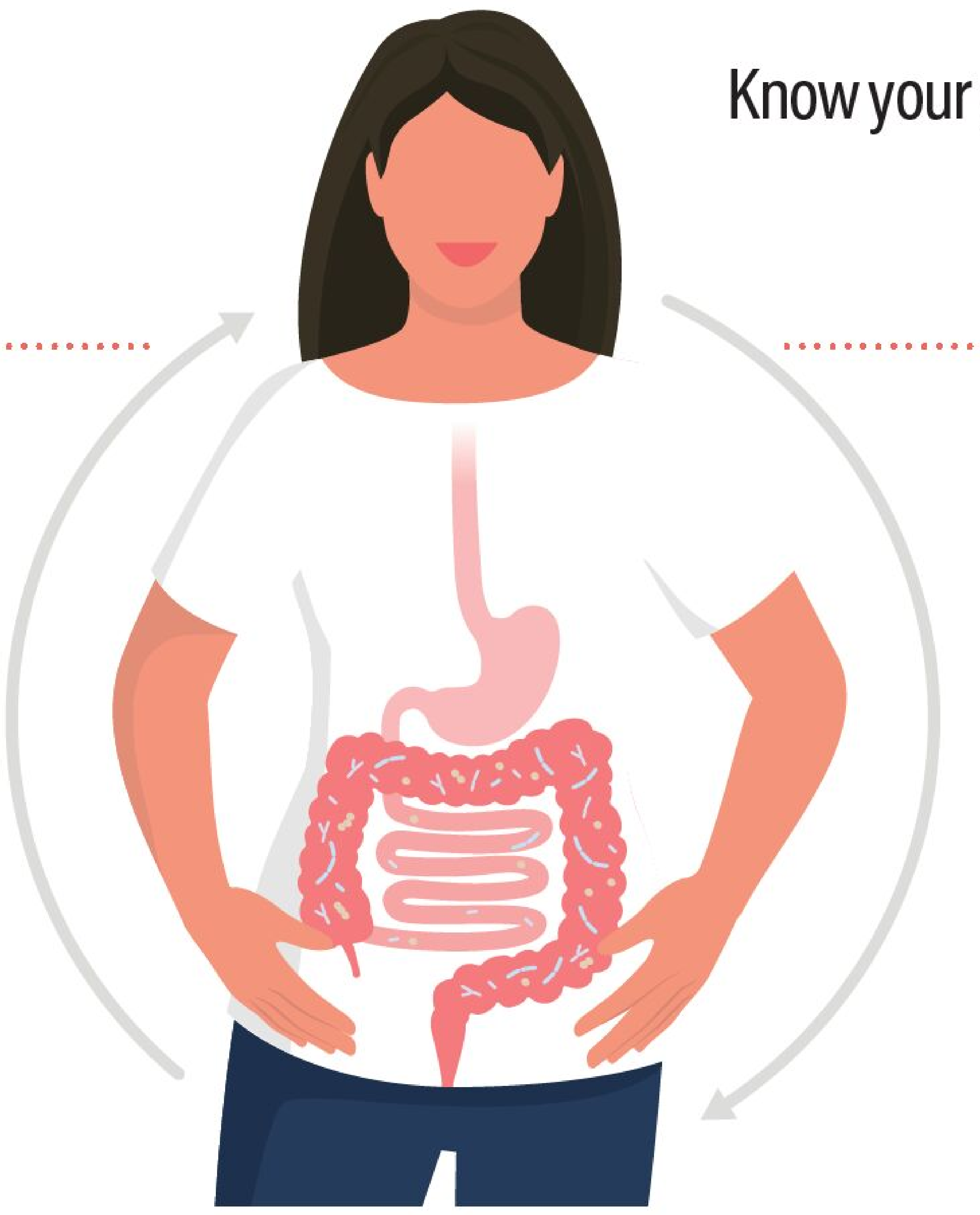
Know your poo!

Your poo can give very valuable information about your health. It does change day to day according to what you've eaten, but if you notice persistent changes in your poo or your bowel habit, then speak to your doctor.



Frequency

Some people move their bowels twice a day, others, twice a week. Infections can cause a sudden change in the number of times you need to poo, but a persistent change in your normal habit should be reported to your doctor. You should be able to hold onto your stool until you reach a toilet, but if you're leaking or have poo accidents then see your doctor.



A TRIP ALONG THE *digestive tract*

The mouth Food is mashed up by the teeth, churned by the tongue and broken into smaller pieces to make digestion easier. Saliva squirts out of the salivary glands and it contains enzymes to begin the breakdown of starch in the food. It also moistens the food parcels (boluses) so they slip down more easily.

The oesophagus (gullet) This is the muscular tube that takes food from the mouth to the stomach. The food boluses are pushed down the oesophagus by waves of muscular contractions. There's a sphincter (muscular ring) at the bottom of the oesophagus and, when that relaxes, food can move into the stomach.

The stomach This contains gastric juices including acids which destroy harmful bacteria in food and digestive enzymes to continue the food break down. Food stays in the stomach between 40 minutes and two hours.

The small intestine Food leaves the stomach through another sphincter and moves into the small intestine (small bowel). This is where most of the digestion and absorption of nutrients occurs. The pancreas squirts digestive enzymes into the small intestine to break down carbohydrates, protein and fats. The gall bladder squirts in bile to break down fat too. The lining of the small intestine is specially designed to maximise its surface area and allow as much absorption of nutrients into the blood stream as possible. Food spends between two and eight hours here.

The large intestine The journey continues in the large bowel where gut bacteria break down remaining food, and water is reabsorbed into the body to make the faeces more solid. Progress through the large intestine is slower, ranging from four hours to three days. The lower part of the large intestine (the rectum) is where faeces are stored. When the time is right (hopefully) and the anal sphincter is relaxed, the faeces are expelled and digestion is complete.

A guide to your microbiome

Words: Laura Tilt

Get to know this tiny yet powerful community and discover the best ways to look after yours

Microbes – tiny living organisms such as bacteria, yeasts, and fungi –are found everywhere on earth, including your body. In fact, your body is home to trillions of microorganisms, the vast majority of which are found in your gut (mostly in the large intestine or colon).

Each human body hosts about 10 microorganisms for every human cell, and these microbes contribute to digestion, produce vitamin K, promote development of the immune system, and detoxify harmful chemicals.

Small but mighty

This community of microbes and their genes (collectively known as your gut microbiome) are essential to your health. They support your immune system, they aid in digestion, and are even capable of shaping your mood and mental well-being. Imagine them as an invisible organ, which plays an important role in maintaining optimal health.

MICROBIOME 101

Microbe

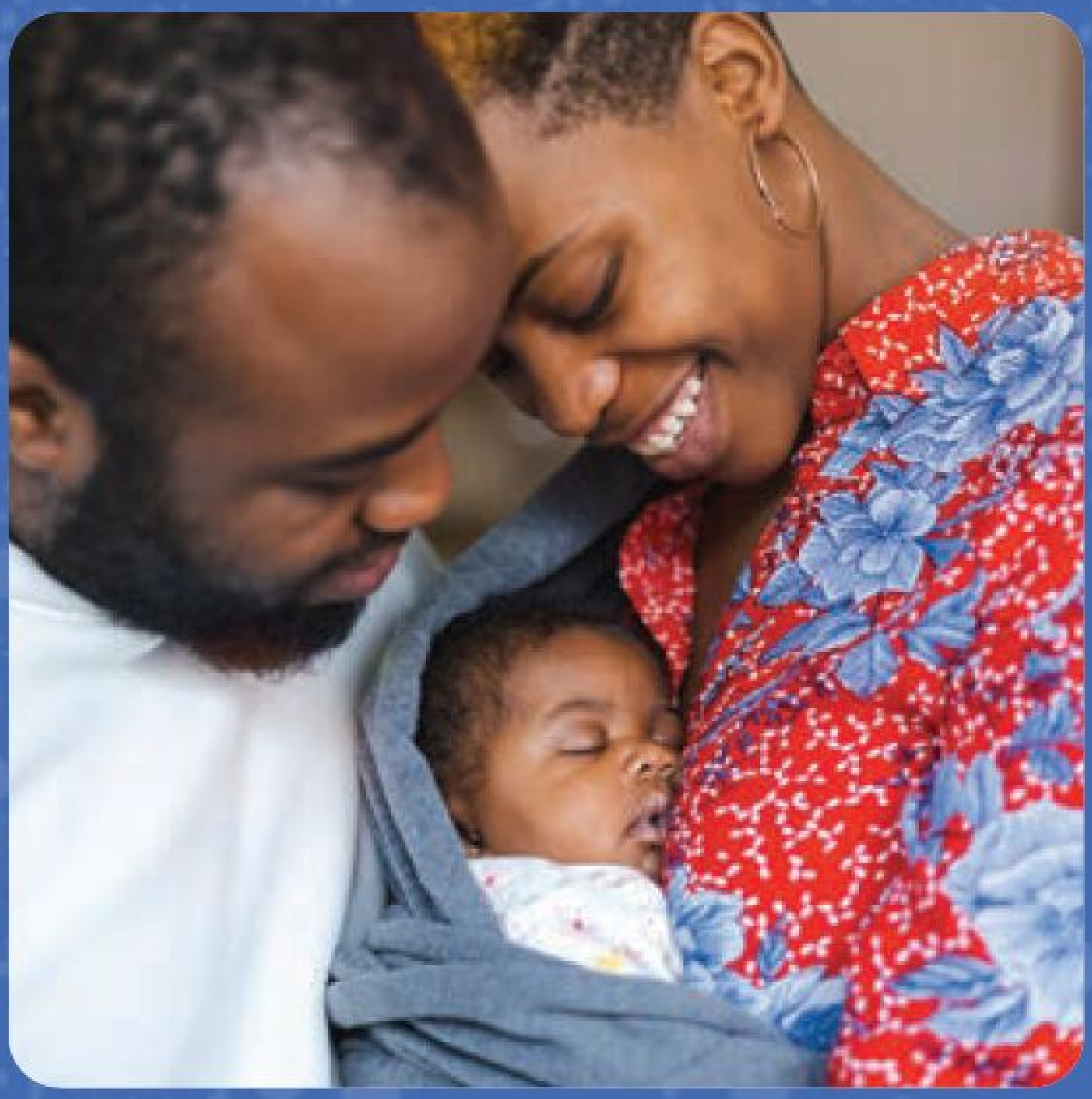
Tiny living things, too small to be seen by the naked eye. Microbes include bacteria yeasts and fungi.

Microbiota

All the microbes that live in a particular area of your body, e.g. the skin microbiota or gut microbiota.

Gut microbiome

The collection of microbes and genetic material that inhabit your gut; the bit we want to nourish.



Where do we get our microbiome?

Scientists used to think we were first colonised by microbes at birth, but newer research suggests bacteria can actually be passed from mother to baby through the placenta. And birth still plays a major role in shaping the infant microbiome. Babies born vaginally are exposed to their mother's gut and vaginal microbiota, which helps kick-start their microbial community. In contrast, babies born by Caesarean section are initially seeded with skin microbiota instead.

In the first few months of life, the microbiome develops quickly. Breastmilk is packed with HMOs (human milk oligosaccharides), a special family of carbohydrates that feed the beneficial microbes in a baby's gut. As babies begin to eat solid foods, new families of microbes are introduced. Through the first two years of life, the gut microbiome keeps evolving, shaped by multiple factors. Skin-to-skin contact, having a pet, and playing outside can all introduce new beneficial microbes into the gut.

By the time a child turns three, their gut microbiome starts to resemble an adult's. After that, it tends to stay fairly stable, though changes can occur due to factors like illness, antibiotics, and diet. With all these influences, it's no wonder your microbiome is uniquely yours! While humans are 99.9% identical in terms of genes, the communities of bacteria and genes in our guts can be 70-80% different from one another.

How does it affect your health?

Although you might have grown up fearing microbes, your gut microbiota are essential to your health. From an early age, the bacteria in your gut train your immune system to understand what it should and shouldn't respond to. Bacteria lining your gut protect you from illness by acting as a barrier between your body's internal organs and tissues and harmful bacteria from the external environment.

Your gut microbes also help with digestion. They break down fibre and in turn produce by-products known as short chain fatty acids (SCFAs). These help keep the cells lining the gut healthy and help regulate inflammation and immune responses.

Microbes can also communicate with your brain via various pathways. For example, gut microbes produce neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) such as serotonin, which can send signals to the brain affecting how we feel. The SCFAs produced when bacteria munch on fibre are also thought to play a role in how we respond to stress. So by feeding your microbes with the right foods, you can also support your brain health.

Microbiome fact!

In any human body there are around 30 trillion human cells, but our microbiome contains an estimated 39 trillion microbial cells including bacteria, viruses and fungi that live on and in us.

How do I know if my microbiome is healthy?

Good question! With so much variation between individuals, a 'healthy' microbiome can look very different from person to person – no matter what you read online, there's no single 'healthy microbiome.' However, scientists agree that a healthy gut microbiota generally includes a diverse mix of microbes (many different species) which are resilient to stressors such as antibiotic use or infections.

On the flip side, low diversity or an imbalance in species (sometimes termed 'dysbiosis') has been linked to conditions like diabetes, allergies and irritable bowel syndrome. It's still unclear whether these imbalances contribute to disease development or are a consequence of it, and current microbial profiling can't yet predict disease risk. As we age, our microbiome naturally loses diversity and genetic richness, but the good news is that a healthy, active lifestyle can help counter some of these changes.

One last note: commercial microbiome or stool testing kits that are now widely available aren't yet advanced enough to provide useful insights, so our advice is to save your money and focus on the following healthy habits (see right-hand page, and the rest of this magazine) instead.

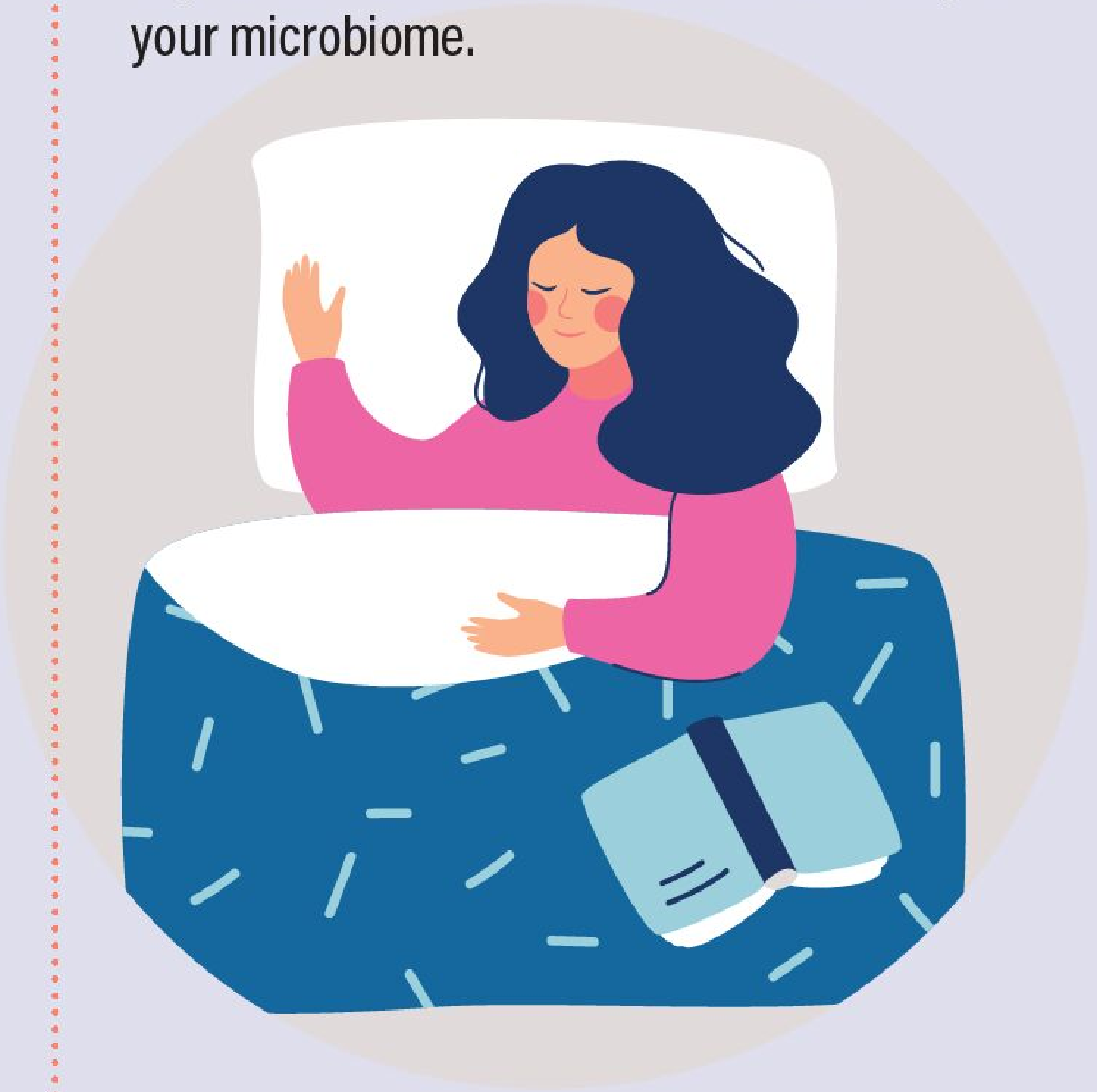
HABITS TO SUPPORT YOUR microbiome

Through food When you eat, you're not just feeding yourself, but your microbes too. So what should you be eating to keep them happy? The most important nutrient is fibre. This carbohydrate, found in fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, peas, beans and lentils, acts like fertiliser for your gut bacteria. In the UK, 90% of adults aren't eating the recommended 30 grams a day, so this is one area most of us can focus on.

Eating a wide variety of plant-based foods is important too. In one study of healthy adults, researchers found that those who ate about 30 different types of plant foods a week had more diversity in their gut microbiomes than those eating 10 or fewer. They also had fewer genes associated with antibiotic resistance. Eat different coloured fruits and vegetables, mix up your grains and choose mixed nuts and beans.

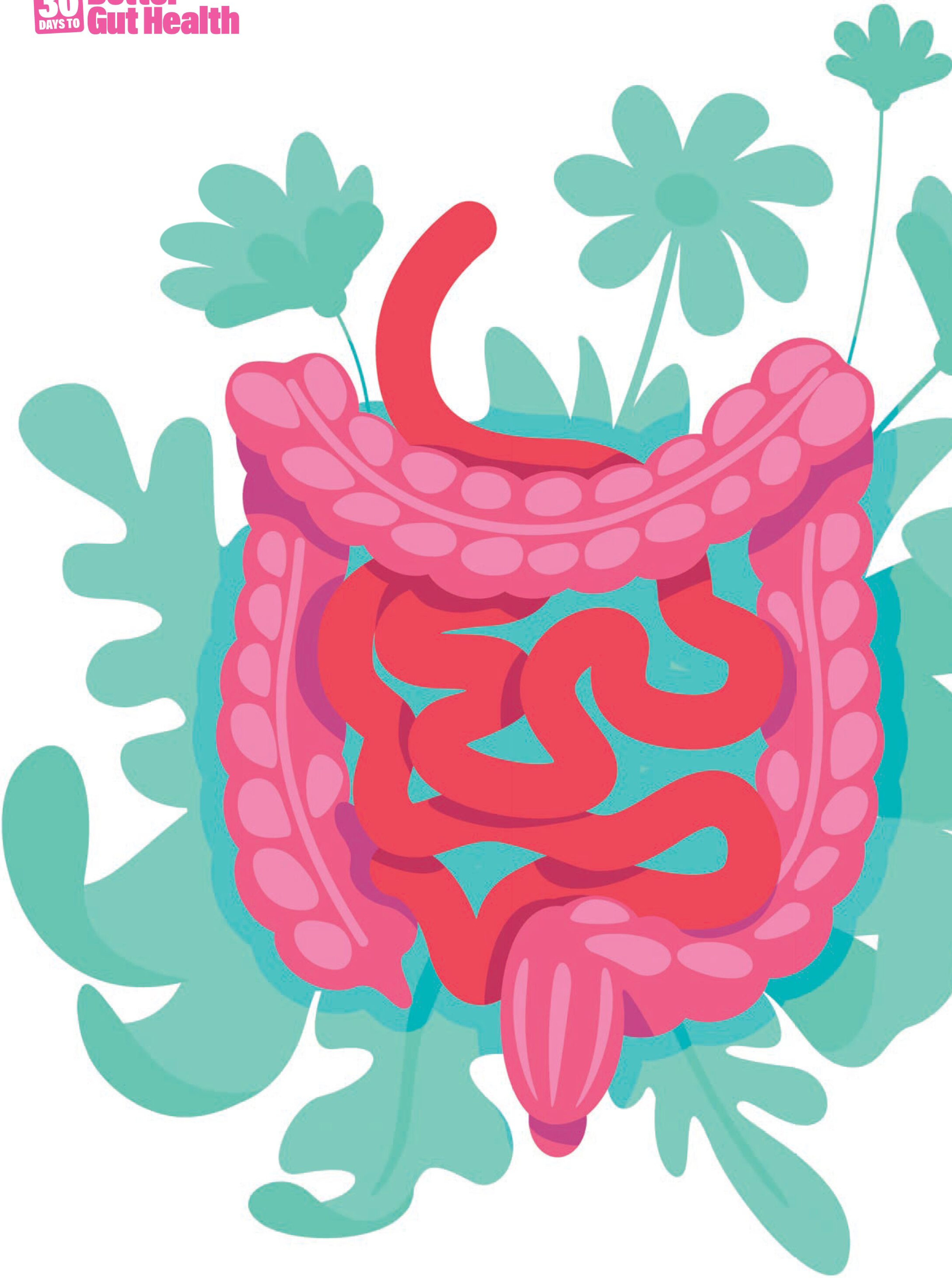
Additionally, prebiotics and probiotics can support a healthy gut microbiome. Prebiotics are specific types of dietary fibre that nourish good bacteria, while probiotics are live beneficial bacteria that help promote a healthy gut environment.

Through movement Just like your brain and body benefit from regular exercise, so does your gut microbiome. Research shows that regular exercise can increase the diversity of your microbiome.



Through rest and relaxation While some level of stress in everyday life is normal and expected, there's evidence that ongoing chronic stress can impact your gut microbiome in unfavourable ways. Chronic stress often comes from doing too much without any downtime, so make time for activities you enjoy and set aside a period of time each day to unwind and recharge.

Wrapping up Your microbiome is an ally in maintaining your health, and taking care of it doesn't have to be complicated or involve expensive supplements or tests. By incorporating simple, everyday habits – like enjoying a variety of fibre-rich foods, staying active, and building in rest and relaxation – you can help your body's microscopic helpers thrive.



Allergy or Intolerance?

Words: Dr Nita Maha

Do you suffer from gut symptoms after eating? You might think you have an allergy or an intolerance to a certain food – but how do you find out, and how do you tell the difference?

An allergy is where the body's immune system reacts to something that isn't necessarily harmful (an allergen), but the body perceives it as a threat. The body activates all its fighter cells to help combat the perceived threat, and this can cause symptoms which can leave you feeling unwell.

Imagine that you hear a noise in your house unexpectedly and think it's a burglar. You raise the alarm and create a lot of commotion, but actually it was just a neighbour popping in to say hello. The perceived threat was a false alarm, but it still created a lot of drama. Allergies are similar; the body can go into overdrive, giving you a lot of symptoms for something which isn't usually a problem. Sometimes this is mild overdrive, but in more serious cases it can make you very unwell.

What is food intolerance?

Food intolerance or sensitivity is different to an allergy. Here you don't get the body's immune system reacting. The body can have trouble digesting the food, sometimes due to lack of enzymes – proteins that help breakdown food. You may be able to eat small amounts of food without any problems.

How common are allergies and intolerances?

Allergies are on the rise, but true numbers can be difficult to know. According to Allergy UK, over 40% of adults now suffer with at least one allergy. It's likely when you go out for dinner that at least one member of your party will have an allergy. It is estimated that 1-10% of adults and children have a food sensitivity.

The rising number of allergies has been particularly noticeable in the developing world. There are many theories for this and research is still going on, but some people believe that pollution, dietary changes, and less exposure to certain microbes could be contributing.

The science behind allergies

The immune system (or defence system) is complex. Proteins called immunoglobulins are made by the immune system to fight off infections. Antibodies are a type of immunoglobulin. Immunoglobulin E (IgE) can be activated in an allergy and it releases several chemicals including histamine, cytokines and leukotrienes, which cause many allergy-type symptoms over the entire body. Symptoms of an IgE mediated response occur very quicky after eating, usually within seconds or minutes.

There are other types of allergic reactions which are not led by IgE, and these tend to be more delayed and less severe. Some people may get a combination of IgE mediated and non IgE mediated reactions which can cause immediate reactions such as skin rashes and swelling, but also more delayed issues such as gut disturbance.

The gut microbiome

This is a collection of organisms that live in your gut. It plays a key role in keeping our gut happy and healthy. New research has shown that children with a higher level of allergy-based symptoms have reduced levels of healthy species of bacteria in the gut. Some studies have shown that using probiotics in early childhood can help prevent allergies.

How can you tell... AN ALLERGY FROM AN INTOLERANCE?

The reality is that it can be hard to tell the difference, but try asking yourself the following questions as there are some key differences

What can cause an allergy?

Most allergies are caused by the following items:

- Tree and grass pollens
- House dust mites
- Animals such as dogs and cat
- Foods such as nuts and eggs
- Chemicals such as latex
- Soy

What are common symptoms?

- Gut: Nausea, diarrhoea, abdominal pain
- Nasal: Sneezing, runny or blocked nose
- Eyes: Itchy, red or watering eyes
- Skin: rashes, typically raised areas called hives
- Swelling of tissues: this is called angioedema and can be life threatening
- Problems breathing: feeling out of breath or wheezy
- More serious life-threatening symptoms (anaphylaxis) are rare. Anaphylaxis can cause several severe symptoms including wheezing, swelling, a drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness and may require hospitalisation

How soon do symptoms occur?

Allergic responses usually happen quite quickly.

How much food can cause a reaction?

An allergy can be caused by a tiny amount of food. If someone has a severe nut allergy it can cause anaphylaxis.

What can cause a gut intolerance?

Food intolerances can cover a broader range of foods including food additives, dairy products, gluten, caffeine and alcohol.

What are common symptoms?

This is where it can become tricky to navigate the difference as many of the symptoms are the same as for allergies:

- Gut: diarrhoea, bloating and cramps.
- Skin rashes and itching
- Feeling tired
- Headaches

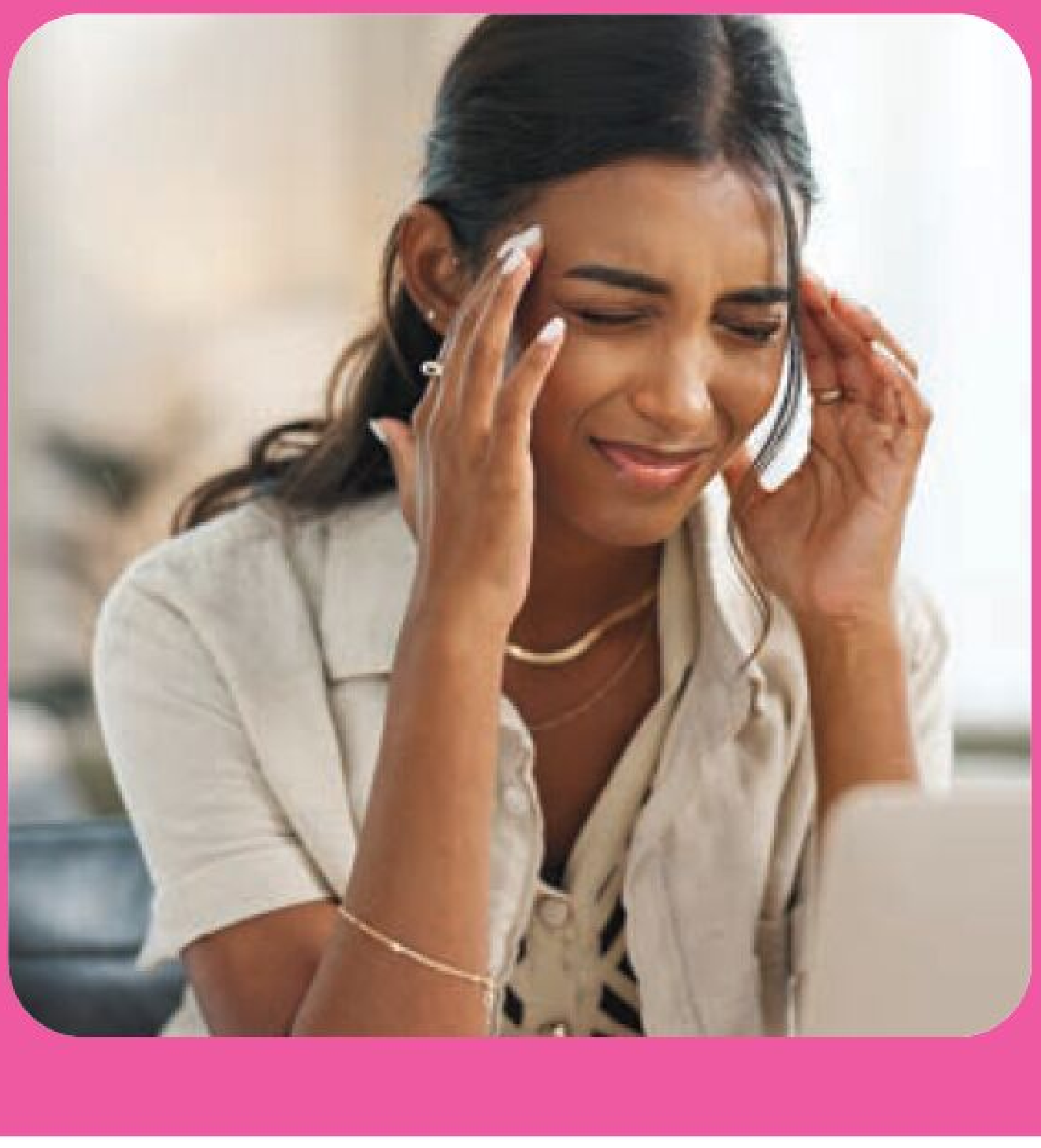
There can be an overlap with other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) which can make it even harder to know the difference.

How soon do symptoms occur?

Food intolerances usually occur a few hours after eating a food – while an allergic reaction tends to happen more quickly.

How much food can cause a reaction?

With an intolerance, generally speaking, you need a lot more of the food in question to cause symptoms and they are not life threatening.



How to get diagnosed

Putting up with gut symptoms can be very limiting. Maybe you don't eat out anymore because you can't face the repercussions. So how can you reach a diagnosis?

Food diary

Keeping a food diary can help identify if there is a pattern between what you eat and your symptoms. Write down everything you eat and record any symptoms that you have. It won't formally diagnose you, but can help identify an issue.

Blood tests

This can identify if you have specific IgE antibodies. For example, if you have an allergy to dust, you may have higher IgE antibodies to dust. These tests can be expensive and only certain items can be tested. The tests can show you are sensitised to a certain thing, but you may not be allergic to it. The test is called a Radioallergosorbent (RAST) test.

Elimination and challenge

If you have an idea about what could be causing your symptoms, try eliminating it from your diet for a certain length of time, such as two weeks, then try introducing it again. Hopefully this will eliminate any symptoms such as nausea, bloating or other gut symptoms.

Skin prick testing

This is arranged by an allergy specialist. There is a small scratch to the skin and a little bit of allergen is placed on the skin. If a red mark appears, or if there is a bit of swelling to the skin, it is measured and can indicate an allergy to that substance. It can be used to test for different substances including food, pollen, mould and pet fur. These tests can be read in about an hour.

Treatments for allergies

There are numerous treatments for allergies that can be tried.

Avoidance

Sometimes the easiest option is to avoid the likely trigger. This can mean checking with restaurants about what ingredients certain foods contain and looking at food lists.

Antihistamines

These are commonly used drugs that you can buy over the counter. They stop the production of histamine, the chemical responsible for causing immune reactions. If you are pregnant, remember that some of these drug effects are still untested, so you need to check with your medical professional before taking any.

Epipen

This is an injection for serious allergies which can cause anaphylaxis. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include throat swelling, wheezing, tightness in throat and loss of consciousness. This may require hospitalisation.

Immunotherapy

This is a specialist allergy treatment which involves exposing your body to certain allergies over time so it becomes used to it.

Common food intolerances

Food intolerances are on the increase and can present themselves through a diverse range of produce.

Lactose intolerance

This is the most common type of food intolerance. Symptoms such as bloating, excess wind, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting can start a few minutes or hours after drinking milk. The body lacks the ability to digest lactose, a sugar found in many dairy products and milk. It can often be genetic and is predisposed to people of Asian, Hispanic and Afro-Caribbean descent.

You can be intolerant to any type of food

Common causes include gluten, alcohol, caffeine, monosodium glutamate (found in ripened fruits, cured meats and savoury foods), and salicylates found in some fruit, vegetables, herbs and spices.

It is important to remember that other factors, such as stress and portion size, can play a part in how you react to certain foods.

Why me?

Certain events (like pregnancy or illness) can compromise your immune system, which may trigger a reaction to a food that you've had no trouble with in the past.

Inflammatory bowel disease

Words: Dr Juliet McGrattan

Let's explore some of the issues we can have with our guts: inflammatory bowel disease affects many of us so it's important to understand the distinctions

According to the charity Crohn's and Colitis UK, over 300,000 people in the UK have inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The two main types are Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. In both of these conditions, the gut becomes inflamed and ulcerated which affects its function, including its ability to digest food and absorb nutrients. These are life-long conditions and, although they can be unpredictable and vary over the course of time, treatments can help to keep them under control and people with IBS can lead normal lives.

It's important not to confuse IBD with IBS. They are completely different conditions with different causes, treatments and outcomes. It is, however, possible to have both at the same time.

Who gets inflammatory bowel disease?

Any of us can get Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, but they most commonly develop before 30 years of age. You are more likely to be affected if you have a relative with the condition. This suggests that there is a genetic link, but the causes are not fully understood. Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are autoimmune conditions, which means the body starts attacking its own healthy tissues. It's not known why this happens. Other possible factors that play a role include the make-up of your gut bacteria, whether you smoke and previous bowel infections. Where you live may also influence your risk suggesting that our environment might be important.

When should you see the doctor?

The symptoms of IBS can be mild or very severe, develop slowly or come on suddenly. If you are having recurrent diarrhoea, losing blood in your poo, or feel unwell with fatigue, abdominal pains or weight loss, you should see your doctor. Simple stomach bugs usually settle within a few days, but IBS doesn't. Sometimes there are symptoms that aren't to do with your gut such as sore, irritated eyes or skin rashes. You won't be able to diagnose this yourself or tell whether your symptoms are due to a gut sensitivity, so it's important you speak to your doctor.

What's the difference between Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis?

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis have very similar symptoms with flare-ups and remissions, but there are some differences between the two that it's useful to get your head around. Crohn's disease can affect any part of your gut, not just the bowel. You might have issues from your mouth to your anus, but it most commonly affects the end of the small intestine. Ulcerative colitis on the other hand only affects the large bowel. The inflammation in ulcerative colitis stays within the lining of the gut and doesn't extend more deeply into the bowel wall, which happens in Crohn's disease. The inflammation of the bowel is continuous in ulcerative colitis, whereas Crohn's disease has patchy inflammation with areas of normal tissue in between.

How do I know which type of inflammatory bowel disease I have?

It's really important to know whether you have Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. Getting a diagnosis means you will have the right treatments to control the condition. Because the symptoms of both can be similar and blood tests don't yet give an absolute answer, doctors really need to look at the bowel to see which parts are affected and the pattern of the inflammation. This might be done using CT and MRI scans, or endoscopy, where the doctor can directly see the gut lining through a camera and take a small biopsy (sample) of tissue to be examined under a microscope.

Treatments for inflammatory bowel disease

Thankfully, there are a variety of treatments available for both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. There's lots of research underway to improve these treatments and discover new ones too. The aims of the treatment are to control flare-ups and reduce any inflammation that is already there, then to keep the disease in remission by stopping inflammation recurring. Your care will be overseen by a consultant gastroenterologist and specialist nurses who will liaise with your GP about your treatment.

Active inflammation can be reduced using steroid medications such as prednisolone. If you have ulcerative colitis, then you will probably be given a 5-ASA medication such as mesalazine, either instead of or as well as a steroid. Unfortunately, 5-ASAs don't work well for Crohn's disease. 5-ASAs can also be also be used regularly to keep the condition in remission. Because the immune system is involved in both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, immunosuppressant medications such as azathioprine, which dampen the immune system, can be helpful. These can reduce flare-ups, but are also commonly used long term to stop symptoms returning. There are other options available if these treatments don't work including biologic medicines, which are given by an infusion or injection.

Sometimes, after careful discussion, you may be offered surgery to remove damaged or severely affected parts of your bowel. You will then require a stoma bag to collect your poo. This is a huge undertaking, but can be a very positive step for people with difficult to treat symptoms and stop them being so limited by their condition.

> "Eat food rich in calcium and iron as these are common deficiencies in inflammatory bowel disease"

Lifestyle changes for inflammatory bowel disease

Changing your lifestyle is not going to make your inflammatory bowel disease go away completely, but it can help to reduce some symptoms and help you cope with those that persist.

Nutrition

What you eat is very important because an inflamed gut doesn't absorb nutrients very well, so during flare-ups there's a risk of becoming deficient in certain vitamins and minerals. Eat foods rich in calcium and iron as these are common deficiencies in inflammatory bowel disease. You should take a daily vitamin D tablet as this is not well absorbed from food. Plenty of fibrous foods such as fruit and vegetables will help keep your gut bacteria healthy. You may need a referral to a dietician if you're having flare-ups to make sure you're getting adequate nutrition. They can also give you advice about how to manage your diet when eating may be difficult.

Mental health

It's really important to acknowledge that having any long-term condition can affect your mental health. Frequent diarrhoea, abdominal pains or fatigue can make going out difficult. It's easy to become isolated which can lead to anxiety and depression. Looking after your mental health is therefore really important. Asking others for help and doing regular exercise are two things that can definitely improve things.

Daily intake

Enjoy meals at regular times, chew well and eat slowly. You may find it easier to digest and tolerate smaller portions of food rather than larger portions. Drink at least 8 cups (2 litres) of fluids per day (e.g. water or herbal tea) to stay hydrated.

The symptoms of... CROHN'S DISEASE

It's important to know what to look out for if you suspect that you may have Crohn's disease, or it runs in the family

Common symptoms associated with Crohn's disease include:

- Diarrhoea
- Blood in your stools
- Abdominal pain – cramping pains, often low on the right hand side of your abdomen
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weight loss
- Excessive tiredness
- Anal fissures (deep cracks in the skin around your anus)

Crohn's disease can affect other parts of the body and cause:

- Joint pain and swelling
- Red and sore eyes
- Mouth ulcers
- Anaemia
- Skin rashes
- A high temperature

The symptoms of... ULCERATIVE COLITIS

Similar to Crohn's disease, the symptoms associated with ulcerative colitis can be wide ranging

Common symptoms associated with ulcerative colitis include:

- Diarrhoea – loose watery stools
- Blood, mucous or pus in your stools
- Abdominal pain
- Weight loss
- Poor appetite
- Excessive tiredness

If ulcerative colitis is affecting the body more widely you can experience:

- Joint pain and swelling
- Red and sore eyes
- Mouth ulcers
- Anaemia
- Swellings under the skin called erythema nodosum
- A high temperature

6 signs of an unhealthy gut

Words: Charlie Watson

The gut converts food into energy, delivering nutrients into the bloodstream, managing waste and protecting against disease. If it's unable to do these things well, we need to work out why

While the main role of the gut is digestion, over 70% of the immune system is ruled by the gut. The intestinal tract forms a defensive barrier from everything we ingest and it prevents harmful substances from reaching the bloodstream. If this barrier is compromised and those harmful substances are able to get past, inflammation can occur.

When we talk about an 'unhealthy gut,' usually that refers to the balance of microorganisms, or bacteria, that live in the digestive tract. These bacteria play a crucial role in maintaining our overall health and wellbeing,

Your body is talking to you

Unlike other areas of the body, we can't easily see inside our gut to tell if something is wrong, however there are plenty of signs and symptoms that can indicate that your gut is unhealthy and needs some care and attention.

Let's make a start on making ourselves better, one day at a time!

Research findings

According to a survey by the healthcare company Bimuno in 2021, over 50% of UK adults reported experiencing digestive issues such as bloating, constipation or diarrhoea, while about 1 in 5 may be affected by IBS

1

Digestive problems

This can include things like getting indigestion regularly, bloating, constipation, diarrhoea, and other gastrointestinal issues indicating an unhealthy gut. Excessive gas or bloating may be an indication that the bacteria in your gut isn't breaking down foods the way it should. Chronic constipation can be caused by poor gut motility, while diarrhoea may be a sign of food intolerance or harmful bacteria.

2

Food sensitivities

Studies have shown that changes in the gut microbiota alter interactions with the immune system to drive the development of food sensitivities. Bacterial and viral infections can suppress appropriate immune responses by triggering inflammation and altering gut permeability, thus increasing the development of a food sensitivity.

3

Skin irritation

Suffering from skin conditions like eczema, acne, psoriasis or rosacea may indicate an unhealthy gut. When there are imbalances in the gut, it releases pro-inflammatory cytokines throughout the body, and the skin reacts to the pro-inflammatory cytokines in various ways.

4

Fatigue

Chronic fatigue and low energy levels may be a sign of imbalances in the gut microbiome and is often found in those with IBS (irritable bowel syndrome). Serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated with sleep and mood, is produced in the intestines. So, microbiome disruptions can directly impact restful slumber, plus your energy and enthusiasm the following day. Additionally, it is thought that gut bacteria may interact with the nervous system, directly influencing your mental stamina, focus and concentration.

5

Mental health

Anxiety, depression and other mood disorders may also lead to poor gut health due to the gut-brain axis. Psychological symptoms can worsen GI symptoms and GI symptoms can worsen psychological symptoms, creating a vicious cycle.

6

Autoimmune diseases

Recent advances in research has shown a relationship and possible cause and effect between the gut microbiota and the initiation or exacerbation of autoimmune diseases such as crohn's disease, lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

Win!

Be in with a chance to win **one of three** of these stylish blenders: the perfect addition to your kitchen to make nutrition simple

a nutribullet 900

The nutribullet 900 is the personal blender that has 50% more power than the original nutribullet. With an Extractor Blade that spins at an incredible 24,000 RPM and a powerful 900 watt motor, you'll have the power to extract even more nutrition and goodness from your ingredients – and you get a smoother drinking experience too.

- ✓ **Blades designed for nutrient extraction, transforming ordinary food into superfood**
- ✓ **Simple, intuitive design for everyday use, and a stylish champagne finish**
- ✓ **Make smoothies in under 60 seconds, enabling you to fit healthful nutrition into your busy day**

How to enter

For your chance to win one of three nutribullets, simply answer the following question at the link below:

How many RPM does the nutribullet 900 extractor blade spin at?

10,000, **15,000**, or **24,000**

Enter online at:

tinyurl.com/nutribulletcomp

or scan the QR code

nutribullet
MAX
Worth £89.99

Terms & conditions: Competition is open to all UK residents aged above 18 years, and there are three prizes available to win. Only one entry per person. By entering, you are agreeing to receive emails from Anthem Publishing. You can unsubscribe from these messages at any time. For full terms and conditions, visit anthem.co.uk/competition. Closing date: 30th April 2025.

How it works

Now we know why we should be looking after our gut, let's find out how to do it! The following pages will guide you through **30 simple steps** that will help you feel better, have more energy, get great sleep, and reduce the bloat from Day 1. The best thing? You can start today!

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DAY 1

Today focus on drinking more water

It's one of the easiest, and most cost-effective, ways of improving our gut health

We're starting our 30-day journey with something that is easy to do with an almost immediate impact on your overall health. What's not to love? We all know that drinking water is vital for our good health. Not only does it aid cognitive function and concentration, but it is also vital to keep our joints lubricated. Additionally, being hydrated ensures sufficient production of saliva, which contains IgA, our first line of defence to support our immune health and protect us from bacteria and viruses. Drinking sufficient water also aids digestion as it helps to move food through the digestive system, preventing constipation.

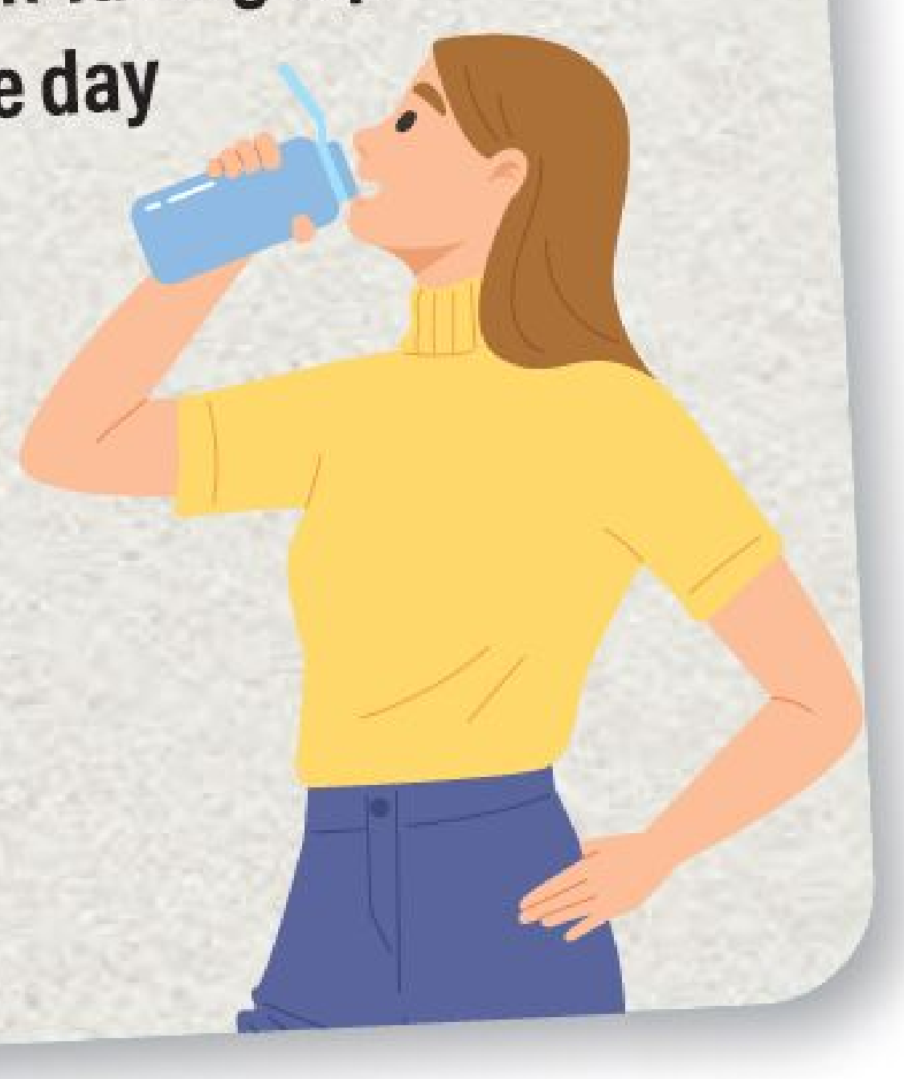
How much should we drink?

There is no definitive guideline on the amount of water we should be consuming daily as it also depends on your losses. Living in warmer climates, being physically active, or even training more indoors, as well as illness such as having a temperature can all impact fluid loss from the body.

Ideally aim for around two litres, or four big glasses, a day but keep an eye on urine production, colour, and odour. Ideally you should be producing good quantities of pale straw-coloured urine several times a day.

Make it easy

Little and often! Taking sips throughout the day from a large bottle will soon get you to your goal

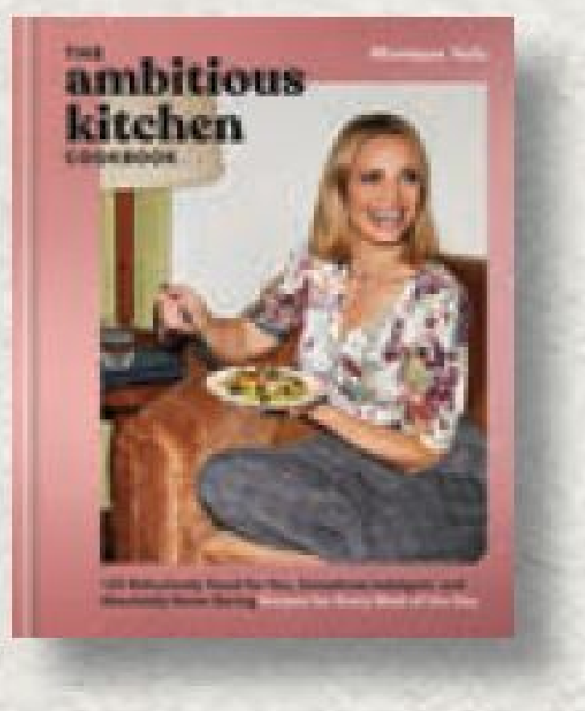


4 *easy ways* to drink more water

Two litres seems like a lot, but it's pretty simple to get in more H20

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS...
Pack in bags more flavour to make it easier to guzzle	Add slices of cucumber and mint or lemon and oranges to add natural flavour to the bottle of water by your desk. And your water needn't be cold either – see below!
Make tea	When it's colder, swap your drinks for herbal infusions; lemon and ginger is an energising pick-me-up.
Go portable to make sure the habit sticks	Get yourself a (big!) reusable bottle, which you can carry around with you. This will help you to keep an eye on fluid consumption through the day.
Eat more!	Eat hydrating foods such as fruit, vegetables, and soups – it all adds up.

Recipe taken from *The Ambitious Kitchen Cookbook* by Monique Volz, photography by Kristin Teig, published by Random House, £30.



RECIPE OF THE DAY

Chipotle chicken with Pozole greens

The chicken and yoghurt provide protein to replenish your muscles

Serves **6** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **40 mins**

For the veggies
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp dried oregano

For the soup
- 800ml (3½ cups) low-sodium chicken broth
- 400ml tinned tomatoes
- 450g (1lb) boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 800ml (25oz) tin of cornmeal, rinsed
- 1 tsp salt

For the bean base
- 400ml (14oz) tinned cannellini beans
- 2-3 chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, plus 1-2 tbsp of the sauce, to taste
- 115ml (½ cup) low-sodium chicken broth

For the mix-ins
- 120g (¾ cup) sweetcorn
- Juice of 1 lime
- A handful of coriander, finely chopped

To garnish
- Tortilla chips
- Greek yoghurt
- Shredded cabbage
- Sliced avocado
- Jalapeños, thinly sliced
- Fresh coriander, chopped
- Lime wedges

1. In a large pan, heat the olive oil, then add the onion and pepper. Sauté, stirring occasionally, until the onion begins to soften, 5 minutes. Add the garlic, cumin, coriander and oregano and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
2. Add the broth, tomatoes, chicken, cornmeal and salt to the veggies. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the chicken is cooked through and no longer pink. Remove the chicken, use two forks to shred it thinly, then return it to the pan.
3. Combine the base ingredients together in a blender until smooth, then pour into the chicken pan. Stir in the corn, lime juice and coriander, then simmer for 10-15 minutes. Season.
4. Transfer to bowls, then garnish with tortilla chips, yoghurt, cabbage, coriander, avocado, jalapeños and lime wedges for squeezing.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've moved for 30 minutes or more

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Daily reflection

Document how moving more has affected your daily wellbeing

On the days I moved more I felt...

On the days I moved more my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Banana

How much?

A superfruit you can always pack in your workout bag. As one of the most portable fruits you can eat, this is your fitness best friend.

Why are they great?

Bananas are rich in fibre and high in potassium, which helps maintain fluid balance in the gut and support digestion. They also contain natural compounds that may help reduce inflammation in the gut, making them beneficial for conditions like Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

Today focus on eating more plants

Adding more plants to your plate is a lot easier than it sounds, and fab for your gut

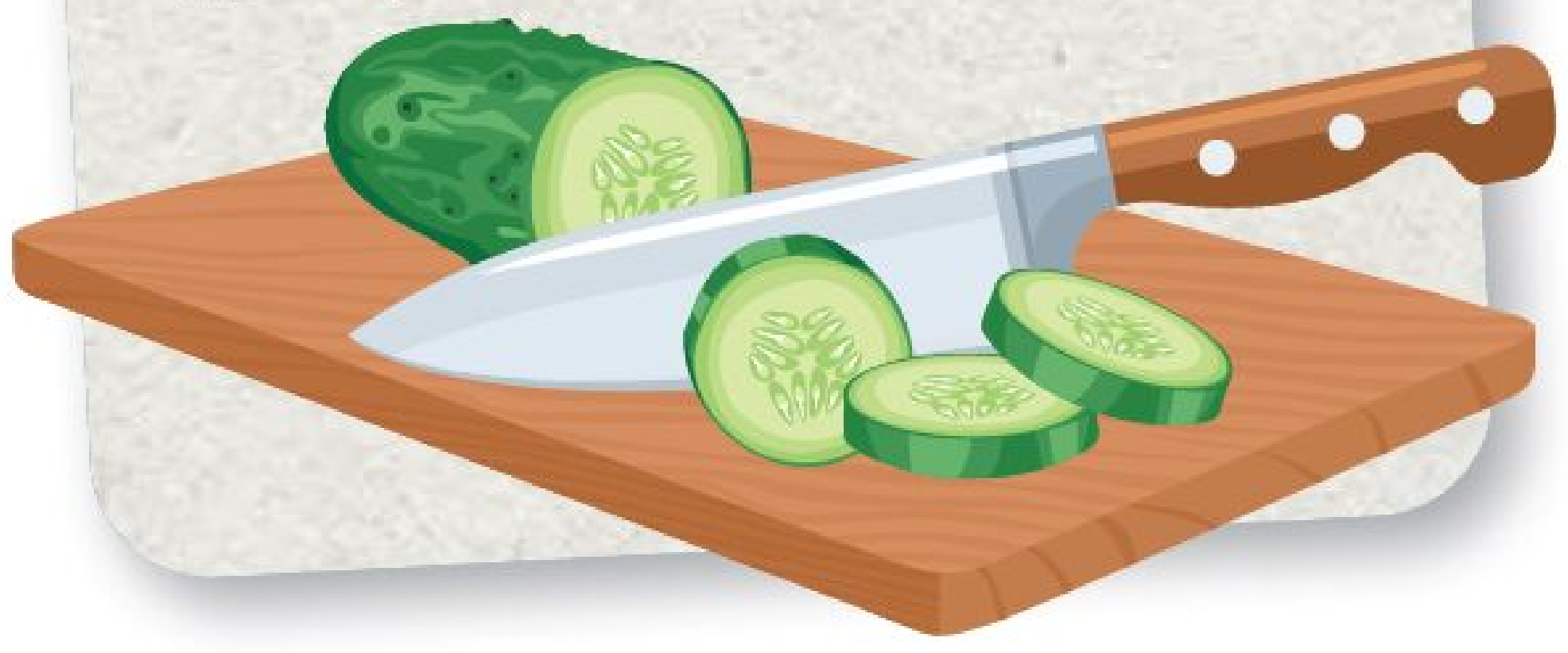
Consuming more plant foods across the week not only benefits your health, by reducing your risk of disease such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease, but also has shown to be more beneficial to the environment. But by 'eating more plants' we don't mean you should be chowing down on leaves all day – plant foods cover a whole host of delicious things to eat, including herbs, spices and beans, many of which are super easy to ramp up. Adding more plant foods that provide soluble fibre, such as legumes, oats and seeds, are shown to reduce cholesterol and also prevent blood glucose fluctuations. Additionally, a diet that's high in plant foods supports your digestive health and gut biome.

How many plants should we be eating?

It has been recommended that we should aim for 30 different plants a week to support our gut biome and also benefit our health. However, if this feels like a big jump from your present intake, start with adding one or two a week and build from there. This week, try to add one new plant with your evening meal, for instance; next week add additional plant foods to your lunch; in the third week, top up your breakfast with something plant-based; and in your fourth week you can add in a fruit snack, and you're basically there!

Make it easy

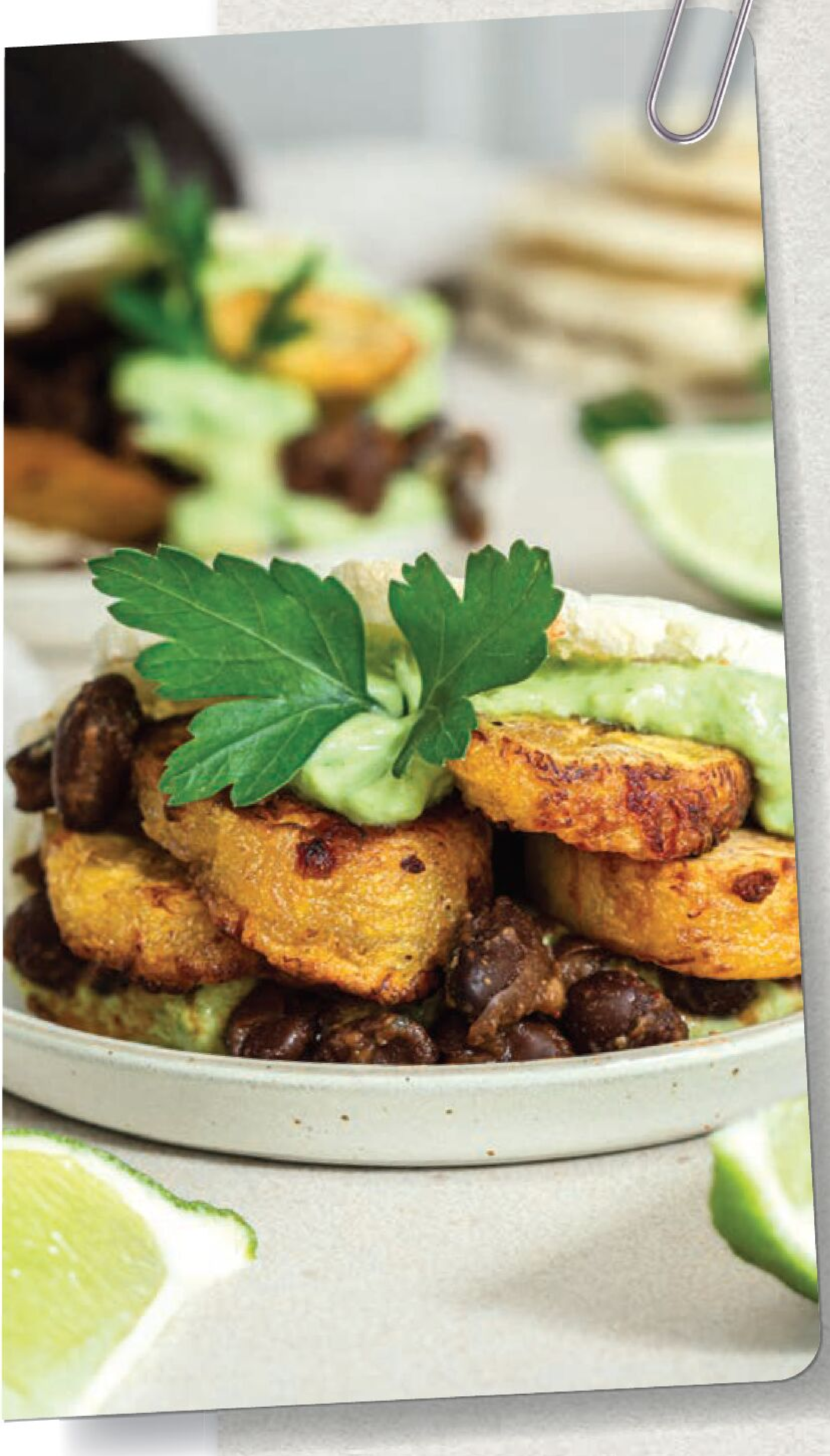
Keep chopped veggies like bell peppers, cucumbers and carrots in your fridge. Pair them with hummus or guacamole for an easy snack that's packed with plants



4 *creative ways* to eat more plants

Incorporate more plants into your diet without remapping your tried and tested favourites

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Add variety	Try adding different beans like black beans, kidney beans or chickpeas to curries, casseroles and stews.
Add vibrancy	Aim to choose as many different colours of fruit and vegetables as you can daily.
Try something new	Try stewing apple or pear, then add a pinch of mixed spice as a topping for porridge. Mix in honey for sweetness and sprinkle over toasted seeds or nuts for a delicious start to the day – and at least four plants!
Make small changes	Try making Bolognese sauce with half mince and half red lentils, then bulk it out with a variety of vegetables and serve with spaghetti as you would normally.



RECIPE OF THE DAY

Black bean & plantain arepas

This tasty dinner includes in excess of 14 different plants!

Serves **4** | Prep **25 mins** | Cooking **25 mins**

1. For the dough, add the cornmeal and salt to a bowl and stir in the water. Knead for 2 minutes, then rest for 10 minutes. Divide into 8 balls and flatten with your hands until you get 10cm (4in) discs. Either bake in the air fryer at 180°C for 10 minutes, or in a pan on a medium heat for 3-4 minutes on each side.
2. Put all the sauce ingredients into a food processor and blend until smooth and creamy.
3. Combine the beans, water, purée, cumin, coriander, the paprikas, garlic powder and dried oregano in a pan and cook for 5 minutes until heated through. Season to taste.
4. Peel the plantains and cut into 1 cm (½in) thick slices. Coat with sunflower oil and toss to combine. Cook in the air fryer for 10-12 minutes at 180°C or pan-fry for 5 minutes each side.
5. Cut the arepas on one side to create a pocket. Stuff with the beans, plantains and sauce.

For the dough
300g (2 cups) cornmeal
375ml (1½ cups) water
½ tsp salt

For the green sauce
1 avocado, stoned
20g (½ cup) coriander
juice of 1 lime
1 garlic clove, peeled
1½ tbsp olive oil
50ml (¼ cup) water
50g (¼ cup) soy yoghurt
50g (⅓ cup) cashews
salt and black pepper

For the black beans
350g (2 cups) black beans
75ml (⅓ cup) water
1-2 tbsp tomato purée
½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp ground coriander
½ tsp garlic powder
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp dried oregano

For the plantains
400g plantains (peeled)
1 tbsp sunflower oil

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've included more plants in your meals

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Daily reflection

Think about how eating more plants affects your wellbeing

On the days I ate more plants I felt...

On the days I ate more plants my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Edamame beans

How many?

100-150g edamame, or soy, beans are a fab addition to your weekly plant tally; they taste great, can add a pleasing bite to salads and curries, and you can buy them frozen so they're always to hand.

Why are they great?

Edamame are rich in polyphenols, and they also provide fibre, protein, and isoflavones – these cleverly feed your gut bacteria and promote overall health.

DAY 3

Today focus on eating more fibre

Simple fibre swaps and additions give your gut the best chance to attain the best health

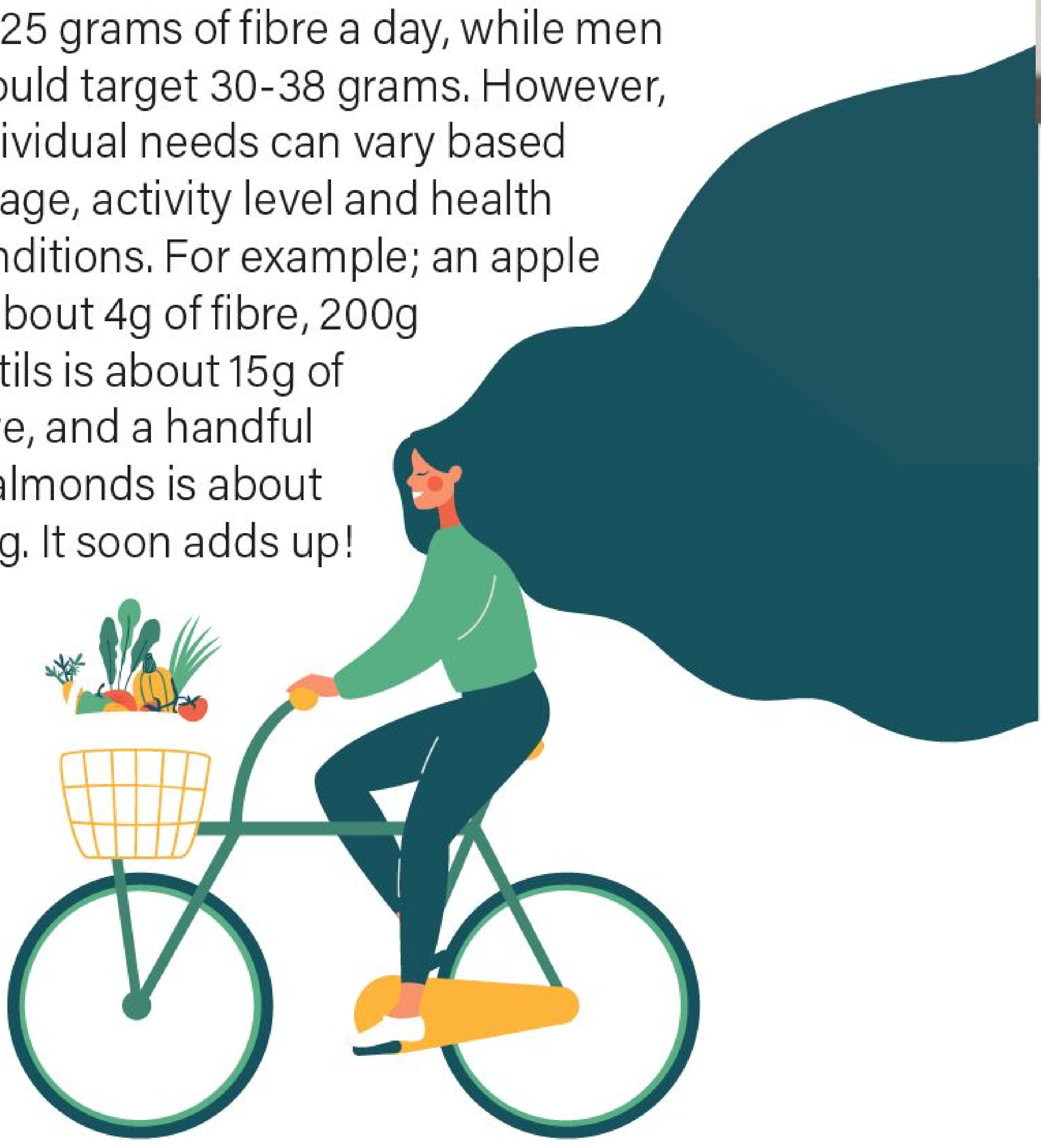
Fibre is essential for our digestive health and ensuring a healthy gut biome. The gut microbiome has a number of functions, ranging from synthesising some vitamins, short chain fatty acids and even neurotransmitters, all necessary for our physical and mental health.

However, the area of research that is most widely accepted and discussed is the impact the microbiome has on your immune health; 70% of our immune system resides in our gut.

Additionally, higher fibre diets help us to feel food and thus maintain a healthy weight for our height. One thing to be mindful of is that those of us who are physically very active, should take care not to let our fibre intake displace carbohydrates that provides energy for our working muscles.

How much fibre should we be eating?

For good gut health, women should aim for 25 grams of fibre a day, while men should target 30-38 grams. However, individual needs can vary based on age, activity level and health conditions. For example; an apple is about 4g of fibre, 200g lentils is about 15g of fibre, and a handful of almonds is about 3.5g. It soon adds up!



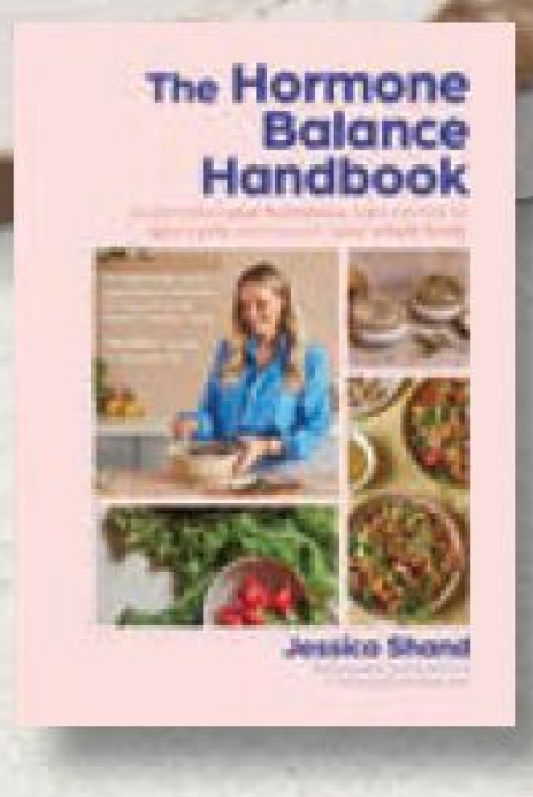
Make it easy

Choose popcorn instead of crisps for an instant boost to your fibre (and a tasty one too)

4 *simple ways* to eat more fibre

Get the most out of the food you eat with just a little creativity

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Simple swaps	Swap white carbohydrate sources for wholegrain such as rice, pasta and bread.
Nutrition boost	Keep the skin on fruits and vegetables such as potatoes, apples and pears.
Sprinkle on top	Try adding seeds and nuts to stir-fries, salads or breakfast cereals.
Wise snacking	Choose snacks such as oatcakes with peanut butter, popcorn or dried fruit and nuts.



Recipe taken from *The Hormone Balance Handbook* by Jessica Shand, published by HarperCollins, £22.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Cajun maple chicken

High-fibre butter beans to keep you regular and everything moving in the right direction

1 hour **20** mins | Serves **4**

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C
2. Combine the marinade ingredients together in a bowl.
3. Toss the chicken thighs in the marinade. Set aside for at least 15 minutes (or longer, if you can).
4. In a big roasting tin, add the onion, pepper, tomatoes, tenderstem, garlic cloves, and the butter beans.
5. Sprinkle with the Cajun seasoning, thyme, garlic granules, a pinch sea salt and pepper, the olive oil and a little maple syrup.
6. Add the chicken and roast for 50 minutes, until slightly browned, turning halfway through.
7. Serve with leafy greens. If you're extra hungry, add some wholegrains like buckwheat, too.

500g organic chicken thighs
1 red onion, peeled, chopped
1 red pepper, chopped
A handful of cherry tomatoes, roughly chopped
200g tenderstem broccoli, roughly chopped
4 garlic cloves, peeled, roughly chopped
2 x 400g tins of butter beans
2 tsp Cajun seasoning
1 tsp thyme
1 tsp garlic granules
Salt and black pepper
A drizzle of olive oil
A drizzle of maple syrup
2 handfuls of leafy greens

For the marinade

2 tbsp Cajun seasoning
1 tsp thyme
1 garlic clove, peeled, grated
1 tsp mild chilli powder
3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Sea salt and black pepper
1 tsp maple syrup

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've increased your fibre intake

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Daily reflection

Document how eating more fibre affects your wellbeing

On the days I ate more fibre I felt...

On the days I ate more fibre my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Brown rice

How much?

Brown rice is packed with fibre, which supports healthy digestion. Just 200g of cooked brown rice has around 3.5 grams of fibre.

Why are they great?

Not only is brown rice a great fibre provider, it's also a prebiotic, which means it serves as food for your gut bacteria, encouraging healthy immune function and reducing inflammation.

DAY 4

Today focus on moving more

Physical activity and keeping mobile has immediate and long-term health benefits

Regular exercise can support our physical and mental health in many ways, from supporting our ability to cope with stress to strengthening our cardiovascular system. New evidence suggests that exercise can increase the variety of good bacteria in our gut. Moderate movement, such as walking, cycling, or yoga, has been linked to improved gut health, while more intense activities, like running or strength training, can also benefit the microbiome. However, it has been shown that excessive or extreme exercise can have a negative effect on our gut biome, potentially leading to imbalances. Regular, balanced movement is key to optimising gut health.

How much movement should we do?

Trying to include moderate level activity three-five times a week should be sufficient to support your gut health. Don't worry, you don't need to suddenly take up extreme sports – a brisk walk, especially if this is something you don't already do, will hugely enhance your physical (and mental) health. Also think about more social sports or class activities, such as netball, football, yoga or Zumba – if it's something you enjoy, you're more likely to stick at it.

Make it easy

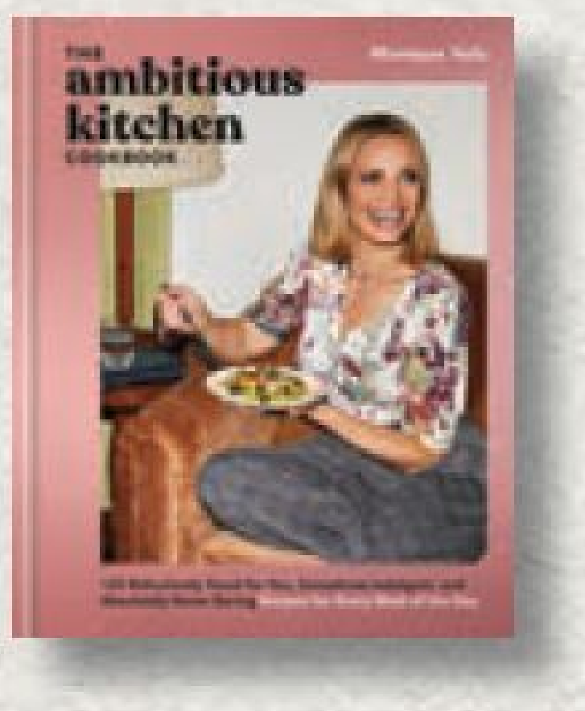
Schedule your exercise like an appointment. Treat your workouts as non-negotiable events in your calendar, and commit to them the same way you would a meeting or important task.

4 simple ways to add in more movement

Try out these easy to implement steps to get you up and moving each day

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Baby steps	Aim for 30 minutes of walking or cycling each day. Take the stairs or walk during lunch breaks.
Simple exercises	Do 10x bodyweight exercises (like squats, push-ups, or planks) in the morning before your shower.
Productive 'me time'	Add a 10-15-minute stretching or yoga session to your routine to improve flexibility and reduce stress.
Make it social	Instead of meeting for coffee or drinks, plan activities like hiking, dancing or a group fitness class with friends.

Recipe taken from *The Ambitious Kitchen Cookbook* by Monique Volz, photography by Kristin Teig, published by Random House, £30.



RECIPE OF THE DAY

Chipotle chicken with Pozole greens

The chicken and yoghurt provide protein to replenish your muscles

Serves **6** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **40 mins**

For the veggies

1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

1 yellow onion, finely chopped

1 red bell pepper, finely chopped

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground coriander

½ tsp dried oregano

For the soup

800ml (3½ cups) low-sodium chicken broth

400ml tinned tomatoes

450g (1lb) boneless, skinless chicken thighs

800ml (25oz) tin of cornmeal, rinsed

1 tsp salt

For the bean base

400ml (14oz) tinned cannellini beans

2-3 chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, plus 1-2 tbsp of the sauce, to taste

115ml (½ cup) low-sodium chicken broth

For the mix-ins

120g (¾ cup) sweetcorn

Juice of 1 lime

A handful of coriander, finely chopped

To garnish

Tortilla chips

Greek yoghurt

Shredded cabbage

Sliced avocado

Jalapeños, thinly sliced

Fresh coriander, chopped

Lime wedges

1. In a large pan, heat the olive oil, then add the onion and pepper. Sauté, stirring occasionally, until the onion begins to soften, 5 minutes. Add the garlic, cumin, coriander and oregano and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
2. Add the broth, tomatoes, chicken, cornmeal and salt to the veggies. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the chicken is cooked through and no longer pink. Remove the chicken, use two forks to shred it thinly, then return it to the pan.
3. Combine the base ingredients together in a blender until smooth, then pour into the chicken pan. Stir in the corn, lime juice and coriander, then simmer for 10-15 minutes. Season.
4. Transfer to bowls, then garnish with tortilla chips, yoghurt, cabbage, coriander, avocado, jalapeños and lime wedges for squeezing.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've moved for 30 minutes or more

○ DAY 1 ○ DAY 2 ○ DAY 3 ○ DAY 4 ○ DAY 5 ○ DAY 6 ○ DAY 7
○ DAY 8 ○ DAY 9 ○ DAY 10 ○ DAY 11 ○ DAY 12 ○ DAY 13 ○ DAY 14 ○ DAY 15
○ DAY 16 ○ DAY 17 ○ DAY 18 ○ DAY 19 ○ DAY 20 ○ DAY 21 ○ DAY 22
○ DAY 23 ○ DAY 24 ○ DAY 25 ○ DAY 26 ○ DAY 27 ○ DAY 28 ○ DAY 29 ○ DAY 30

Daily reflection

Document how moving more has affected your daily wellbeing

On the days I moved more I felt...

On the days I moved more my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Banana

How much?

A superfruit you can always pack in your workout bag. As one of the most portable fruits you can eat, this is your fitness best friend.

Why are they great?

Bananas are rich in fibre and high in potassium, which helps maintain fluid balance in the gut and support digestion. They also contain natural compounds that may help reduce inflammation in the gut, making them beneficial for conditions like Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

Today focus on writing a food diary

Understand your dietary habits by tracking what you eat and identifying patterns

Writing a food diary from time to time can be useful, particularly for those who may be trying to lose weight or change a dietary behaviour. However, bear in mind that this is not something we would recommend to those who have previously had a disordered relationship with food. The main benefit of keeping a food diary for a few days is that it can help you identify patterns that may be beneficial, or not, to your health.

For those individuals who tend to stress eat, or not register their eating due to hectic lifestyles, it can help to identify behaviours such as erratic eating or choosing a higher percentage of non-nutrient dense foods, both which can leave you feeling low in energy and have a negative impact on your mood.

It can also be useful for you if you think you might have a food intolerance or allergy by recording dietary intake and symptoms.

In all cases, if you want to keep a food diary to help you assess any of the above scenarios, it's advisable to do this under the supervision of a registered dietitian, who can ensure appropriate assessment and ongoing support.

When should we write a food diary?

Consistency helps. While it's not necessary to keep a food diary as a longer habit, sticking with it over the course of a month should help you pinpoint areas of concern. Write it daily, jotting down what you've eaten and any effects as a result, in terms of energy levels, bloating or gastric distress. Over the period of a month it should give you a great insight into the foods that work (and don't) for you.

Make it easy

Scribble down meals right after eating, and remember to add in rough portion sizes as well.

4 *simple ways* to stay on top of your food diary

Remove the 'chore' mindset and make the diary part of your daily routine

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Strike while the iron's hot	Record every meal and snack right after eating to ensure accuracy and prevent forgetting details.
Include everything	Note portion sizes, ingredients and any toppings or dressings to get the complete picture.
Before and after	Write how you feel before and after eating to identify patterns, like energy levels or cravings.
Use additonal resources	Digital apps or printable templates make tracking easier and can be really helpful over time.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Celeriac and apple remoulade

Crunchy apple is the perfect addition to celeriac in this creamy remoulade

15 mins | Serves **6** as a starter or side

1 celeriac, peeled, shredded
1 onion, peeled, finely sliced
2 crisp apples, cored, cut into matchsticks

For the dressing
240ml (1 cup) vegetable oil
120ml (½ cup) unsweetened soya milk
1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 tbsp white wine vinegar
1 garlic clove, peeled, roughly chopped
1 tsp sugar
½ tsp celery salt
2 tbsp wholegrain mustard
a small bunch of fresh chives, finely chopped
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. For the dressing, combine the soya milk, oil, Dijon mustard, vinegar, garlic, sugar and celery salt in a jug. Blend with a hand blender until thick and emulsified.
2. Stir through the wholegrain mustard and chives, then season to taste.
3. Combine the shredded vegetables and apple in a large bowl, then add the dressing. Mix together until well coated. Garnish with a few chopped chives and serve immediately.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've written in your diary

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Daily reflection

Document the foods that appear to be good or bad for your gut

What food has made my gut happy?

What food has irritated my gut?

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Apples

How many?

Apples are a really easy way to top up your fibre, with around 4g fibre per fruit, and they act as a super portable snack that's easy to jot down in your journal afterwards!

Why are they great?

Aside from the fibre, they're a prebiotic, encouraging the growth of healthy gut bacteria, they help maintain healthy bowel function and they're rich in polyphenols, which reduce inflammation. They're also gentle on the stomach, aiding digestion and reducing bloating.

DAY 6

Today focus on checking your poo

The quality of a bowel movement is more important than the frequency

Don't worry!

Loads of things can affect your poo that have nothing to do with how healthy your gut is; not least your response to stress. The occasional 'bad' poo is nothing to worry about.

While checking your poo may sound like a strange behaviour, it can actually help you to identify changes to your digestion which may have other health implications. Changes in colour, shape or texture can indicate infections, digestive issues or other health problems. Research has shown that bowel cancer screening can help detect cancer early, even before you have symptoms, with at least 9 out of 10 people surviving if the cancer is found early.

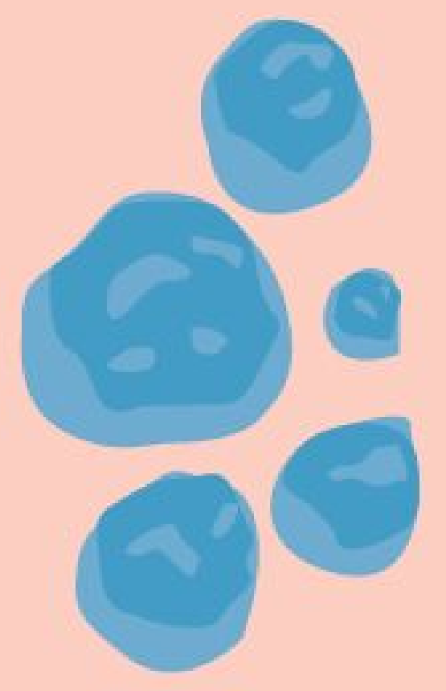
The main symptoms of bowel cancer include blood in your stool, bleeding form your bottom, a change in how often you open your bowels, or regularly alternating between diarrhoea and constipation, a pain or lump in your abdomen, unexplained weight loss and feeling tired. It is recommended that even if you have one of these symptoms for three weeks or more, you should seek medical attention for further investigations. In addition, becoming familiar with the Bristol stool chart (see below) can also help you to become aware of changes that may be related to your dietary behaviours.

How often should we check?

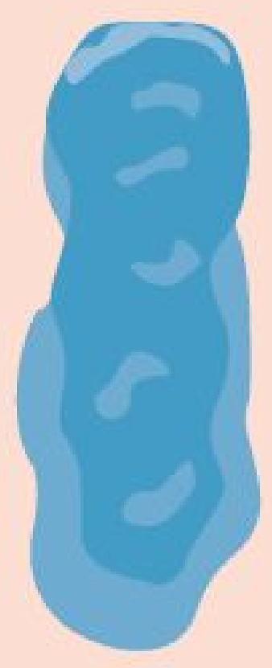
Checking your poo regularly can be a helpful way to monitor your gut health. Ideally, you should pay attention to your poo every time you go to the bathroom.

The Bristol *stool* chart

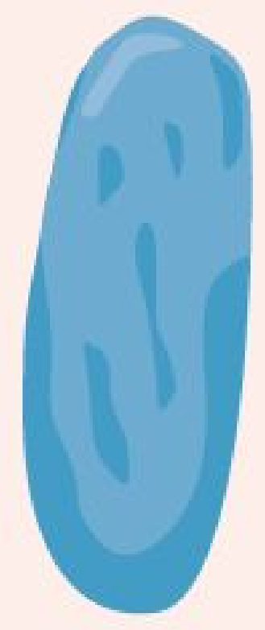
Keep a good eye on your poo; regular, comfortable toilet trips are what we're after. Talk to your GP about any unexplained changes you notice – don't feel embarrassed; a simple chat could rule out all sorts of issues and get you on the road to good health in no time.



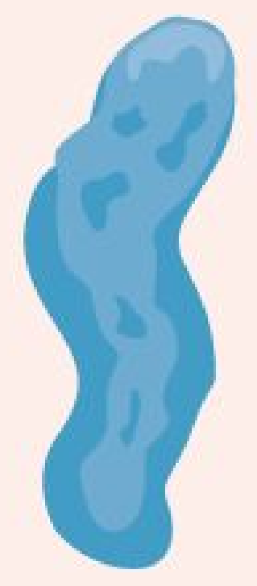
TYPE 1
Severe constipation Separate hard lumps



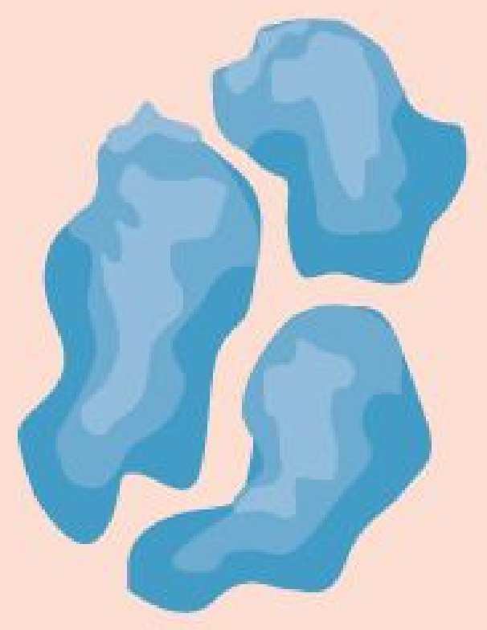
TYPE 2
Mild constipation Sausage shaped and lumpy



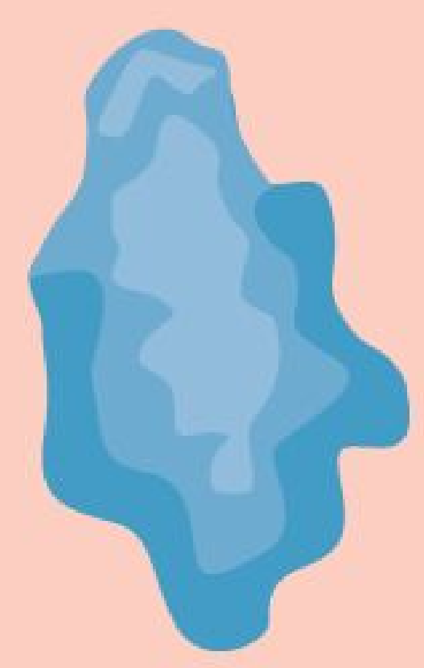
TYPE 3
Normal Sausage shaped with cracks in the surface



TYPE 4
Normal Smooth and soft sausage



TYPE 5
Mild diarrhea Mushy consistency with ragged edges



TYPE 6
Severe diarrhea Liquid consistency with no solid pieces

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Golden vegetable crumble

Butternut squash is a great source of fibre to keep you regular

Serves **8** | Prep **15** mins | Cook **30** mins

2 tbsp olive oil
200g (1 cup) butternut squash, chopped
150g (1½ cups) sweet potato, chopped
1 onion, peeled, chopped
2 carrots, peeled, sliced
1 tsp cinnamon
¼ tsp turmeric
600ml (1pt) vegan stock
70g (1 cup) baby corn, halved lengthways

For the topping

70g (⅓ cup) vegan margarine
100g (¾ cup) plain flour
70g (½ cup) walnuts, chopped
4 tbsp porridge oats
salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F.
2. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Fry the squash, sweet potato, onion and carrots for 5 minutes. Stir in the cinnamon and turmeric and cook for 2 more minutes. Pour in the stock, reduce the heat and simmer, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes. Stir in the baby corn.
3. For the crumble topping, rub the margarine into the flour in a mixing bowl until it forms a breadcrumb consistency. Stir in the walnuts and oats until mixed thoroughly, then season to taste with salt and pepper.
4. Transfer the vegetables into a 20cm (8in) square baking dish. Top with the crumble mixture and bake in the oven for 20 minutes, or until warmed through and golden. Leave to cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've checked your poo (well done!)

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

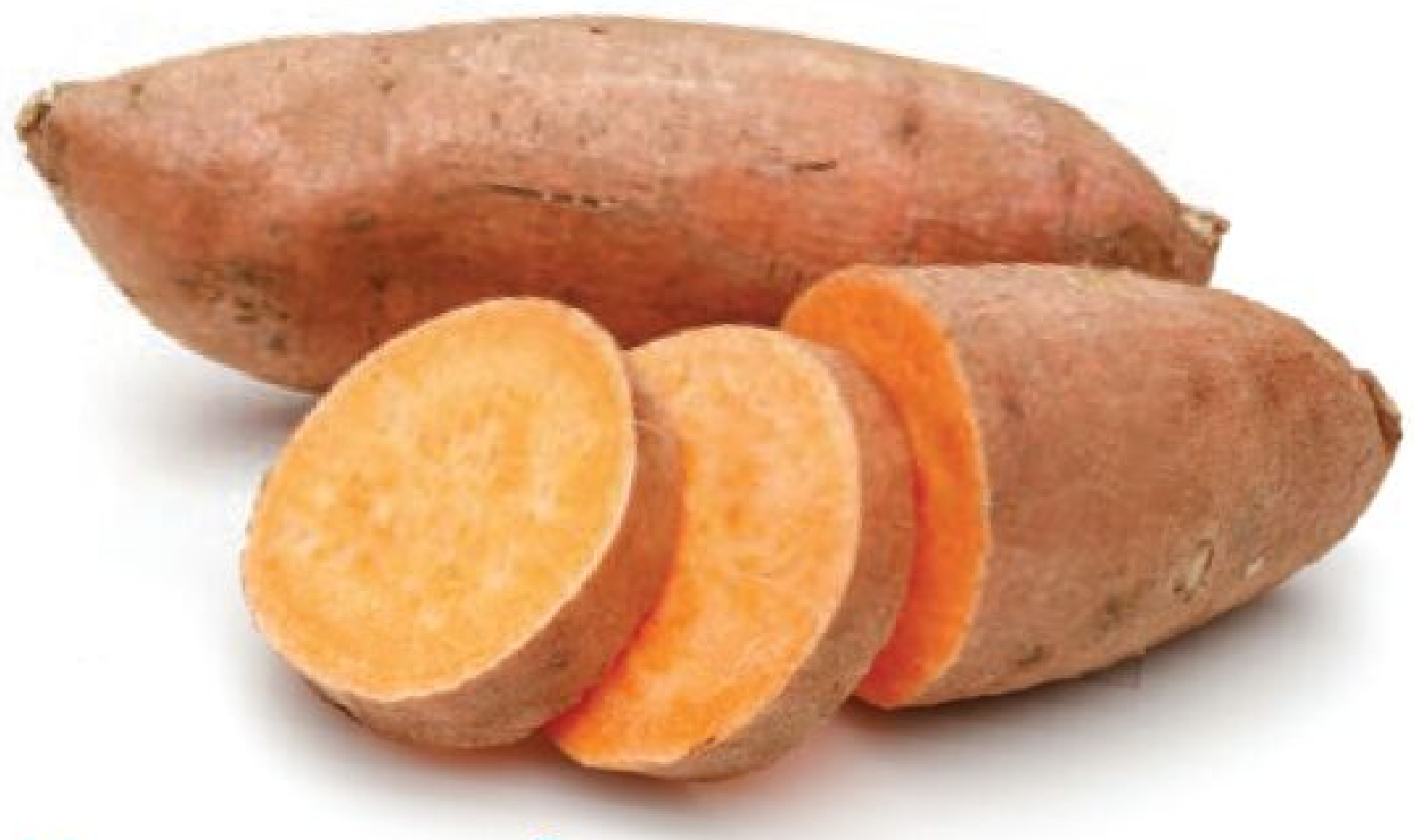
Document your poo in relation to your food diary (see page 34)

Did I notice anything different?

Checking my food diary; what made a difference?

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Sweet potatoes



How many?

One medium sweet potato contains about 4g of fibre, and is incredibly versatile – you can mash or roast them, or even bake in the oven for delicious chips.

Why are they great?

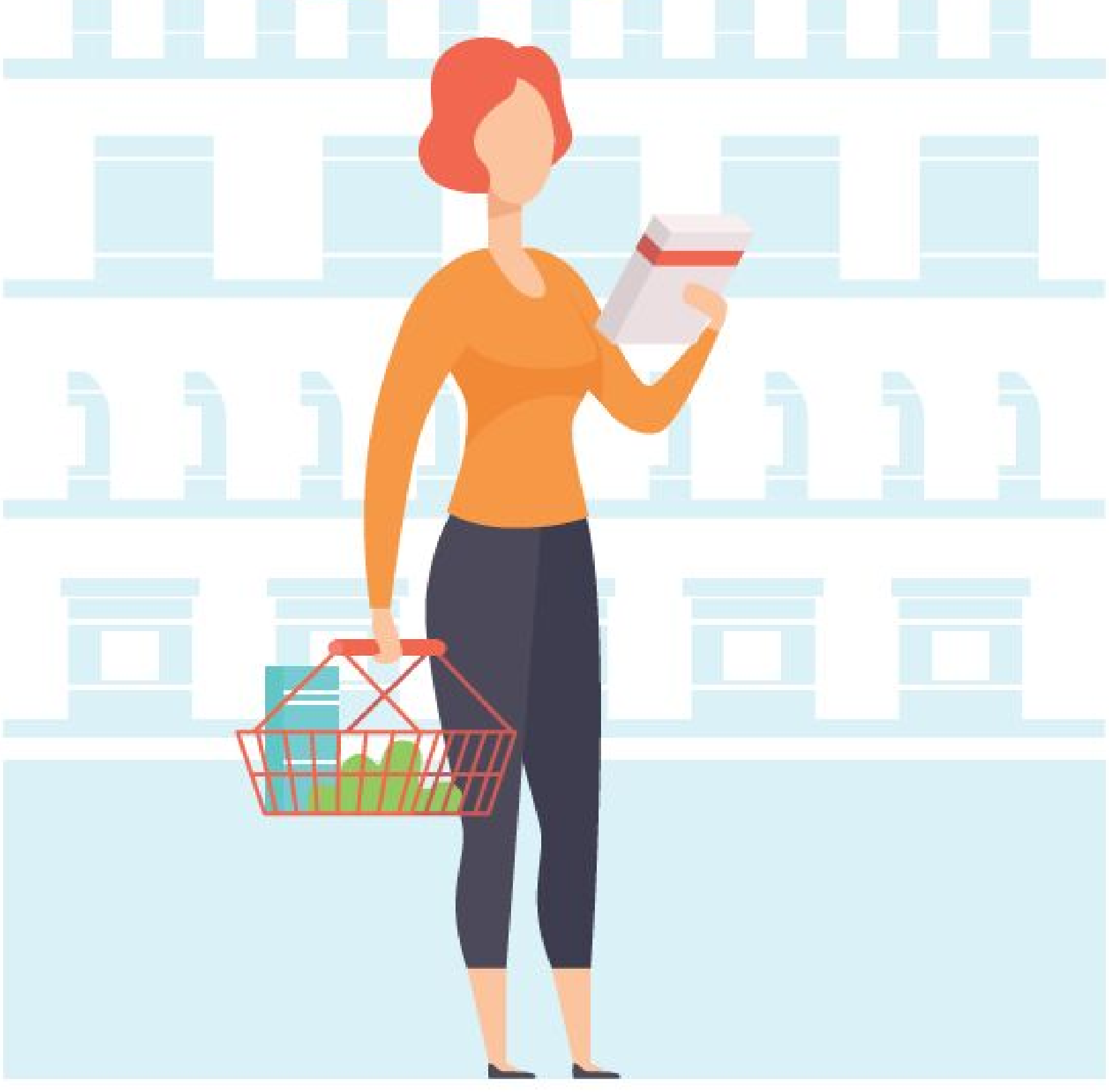
Sweet potatoes are rich in soluble and insoluble fibre. They're also a prebiotic, feeding those beneficial gut bacteria, and they contain resistant starch, a type of fibre that resists digestion in the small intestine and leading to top marks in the stool chart!

TOMATO SOUP

DAY 7

Today focus on checking food labels

A little bit of due diligence that results in simple food swaps goes a long way to better health

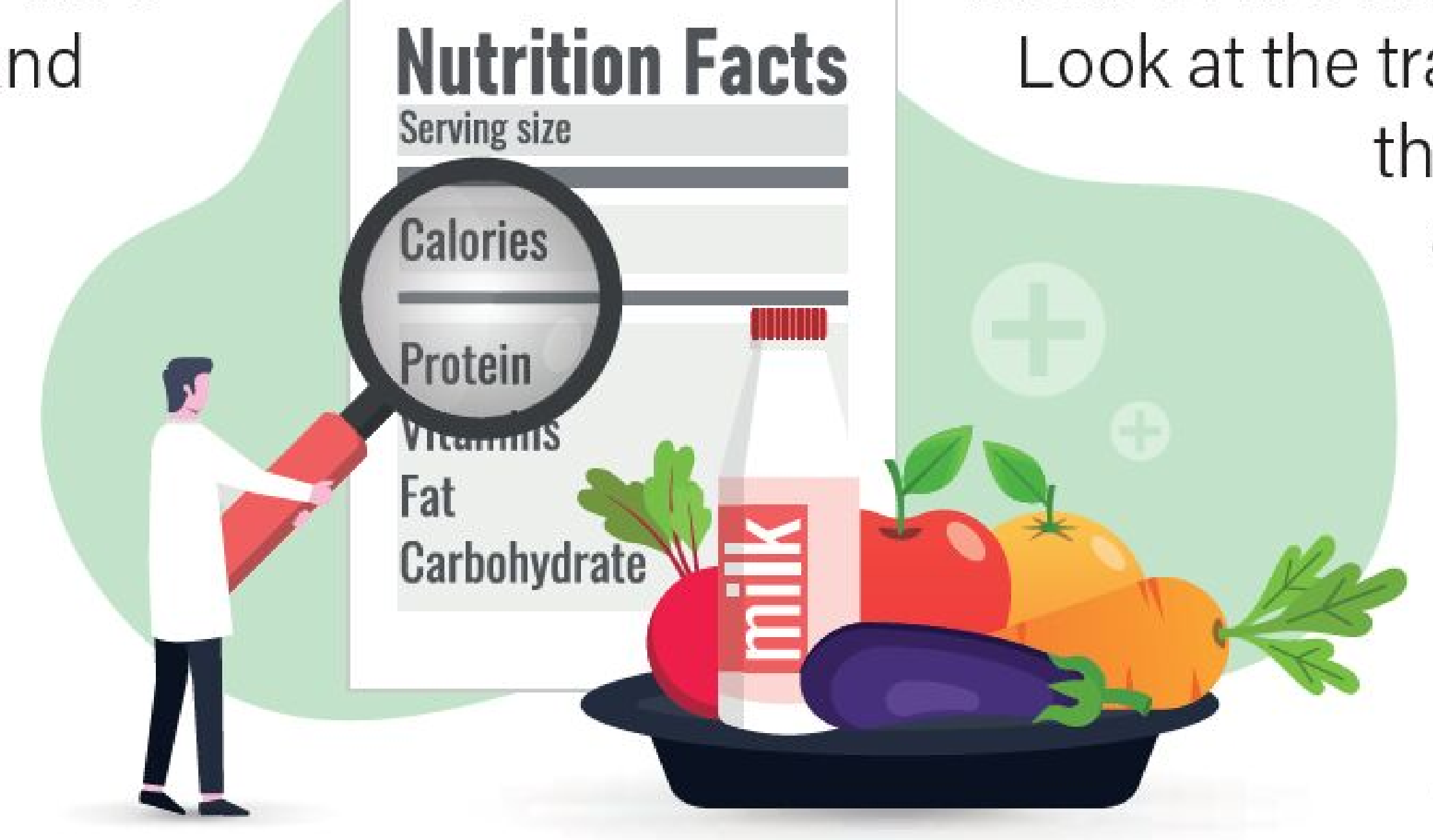


Keeping an eye on food labels can be a helpful tool, but bear in mind it is something that should help inform, not something to become obsessed over or that evokes anxiety.

For those of us with specific dietary needs, such as being coeliac, or for those with food allergies, checking food labels for ingredients might be quite normal. For the rest of us, it's worth getting into the habit. Quickly checking food labels while you're shopping can help identify high-fibre foods, added sugars and artificial ingredients that can negatively affect digestion. Labels on certain foods can also highlight prebiotics and probiotics, which support a healthy microbiome. By choosing whole, minimally processed foods with natural ingredients, you can make more informed decisions that promote better gut health, regulate digestion and support overall well-being.

How often should we be checking?

It can feel overwhelming to suddenly be instructed to examine all the food you're used to buying, so take it easy, and on your next food shop, just check the labels of five items you buy regularly. Look at the traffic light symbol on the front and see if you can make a healthier choice – for instance, switching a high sugar cereal for a wholewheat version with no added sugar.



Make it easy

If you don't like the taste of wholewheat pasta, start off by mixing it with white pasta and gradually reducing the amount of white pasta over time

4 *simple* supermarket swaps

Little changes can lead to massive benefits in the long run

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Choose plain yoghurt	Flavoured yoghurts often contain added sugars. Plain yoghurt supports digestion and gut health.
Switch to whole fruit	Fresh fruit is rich in fibre and antioxidants, which promote healthy digestion and reduce inflammation.
Olive oil over vegetable oil	Olive oil contains healthy fats and antioxidants that reduce inflammation in the gut.
Check labels	Check the labels on bread carefully, and opt for a loaf that's wholemeal rather than just 'brown'

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Griddled bananas with blueberries

Fruit, plain yoghurt and porridge oats taste delicious and are a brilliant swap for flavoured yoghurt

Serves **6** | Prep **5 mins** | Cook **8-10 mins**

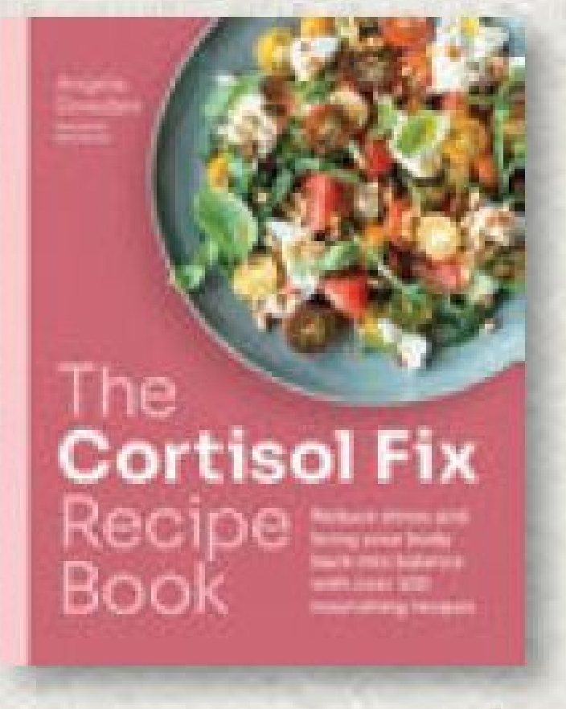
4 bananas, unpeeled

8 tbsp fat-free Greek yoghurt

4 tbsp oatmeal or fine porridge oats

125g (¾ cup) blueberries

runny honey, to serve



The Cortisol Fix Recipe Book

Recipe taken from *The Cortisol Fix Recipe Book* by Angela Dowden, published by Hamlyn, £18.99. Photography by William Shaw

1 Heat a ridged griddle pan over a medium-hot heat, add the bananas and cook for 8-10 minutes, or until the skins are beginning to blacken, turning occasionally.

2 Transfer the bananas to serving dishes and, using a sharp knife, cut them open lengthways. Spoon over the yoghurt and sprinkle with the oatmeal or oats and blueberries. Serve immediately, drizzled with a little honey.

TIP Bananas contain prebiotics which feed your good gut bacteria. Slightly less ripe bananas have more prebiotics than overripe ones.

Habit tracker

Try and make a positive food switch once a week

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Document any changes you've noticed by making simple swaps

My gut-friendly food switch was...

On the days I ate the new food I felt...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Quinoa

How much?

Quinoa is a hero food you can swap for rice in curries or add to salads for a nutrient-dense hit. 200g of cooked quinoa is equivalent to 5g of fibre.

Why are they great?

As well as fibre, quinoa is high in protein, and rich in essential minerals and vitamins. Not only that, but the healthy fats in quinoa can help lower cholesterol and reduce inflammation, contributing to improved heart health.

DAY
8

Today focus on eating more yoghurt

Eating yoghurt every day can provide a vital source of calcium and other nutrients

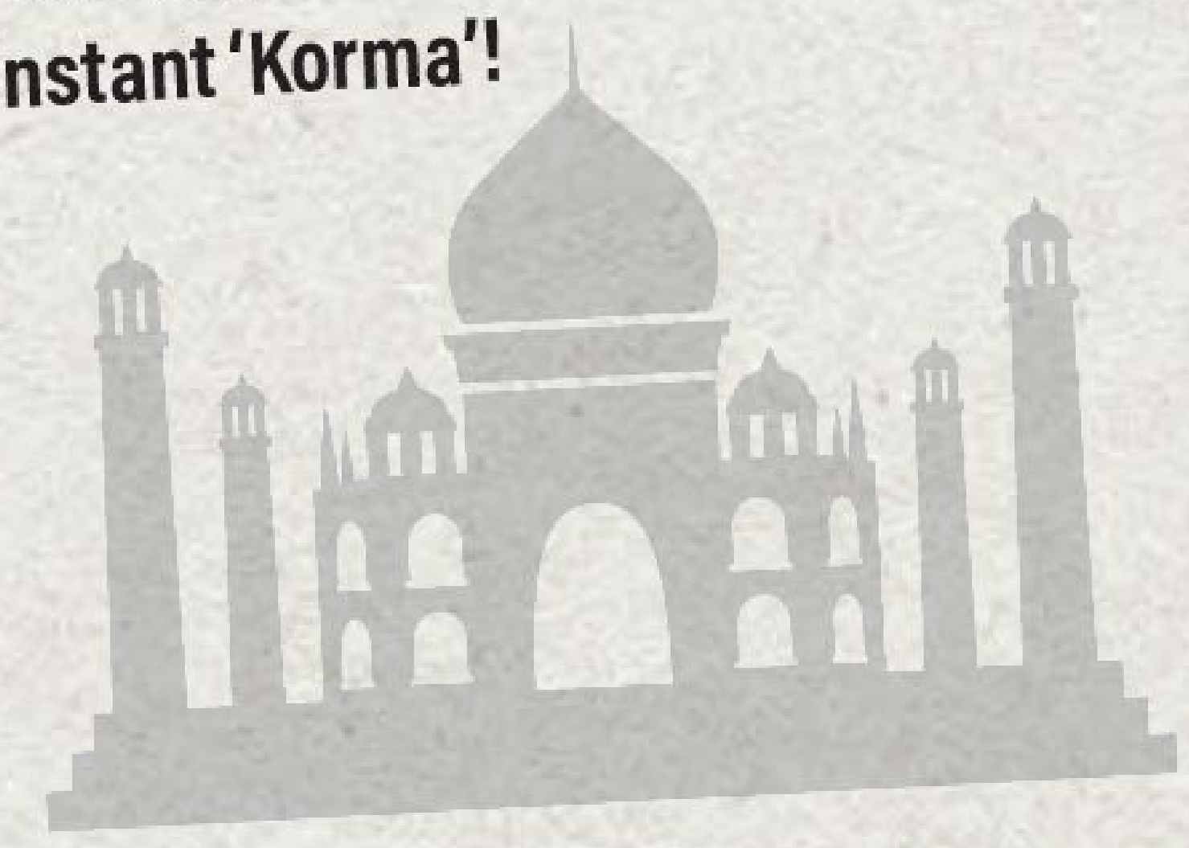
Yoghurt is a great food choice as it provides protein, calcium and live bacteria, known as probiotics, that are hugely beneficial to our gut biome. The unsweetened Greek style varieties in particular are a great source of protein, which help to keep you fuller for longer, preventing blood sugar fluctuations and overeating. Probiotics in yoghurt also support healthy digestion, boost immune function and promote a balanced gut microbiome, which can reduce inflammation and improve overall gut health. Eating yoghurt daily can support digestion, enhance nutrient absorption and help maintain a healthy weight.

How much should you be eating?

The recommended daily allowance of calcium in the UK for adult males and females up to the age of 50 years is 1000mg a day. Consuming 1 pint or equivalent of dairy a day can help achieve this 1000mg requirement.

Make it easy

Stir a spoonful of Greek yogurt into a tomato-based curry sauce for instant 'Korma'!



4 *creative ways* to add yoghurt to your diet

Give your drinks, meals and snacks a welcome makeover...

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Up your smoothie game	Try making smoothies as a great post run option – blend milk, Greek yoghurt, frozen berries and honey for a refreshing recovery drink.
Take a dip	Try this dip as a great accompaniment to a curry: Toast and grind up cumin seeds, chop up a cucumber and grate a carrot. Mix into a bowl of natural Greek yoghurt, then add a pinch of salt and chilli flakes to taste.
Simple swaps	Swap your protein bar snack for a pot of high protein yoghurt and a handful of granola.
Mayo begone	Swap out half your mayonnaise for natural Greek yoghurt for a gut friendly potato salad.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Chard and courgette kefir tzatziki

Bring good bacteria into your gut to kick-start digestion and help you get rid of toxins

By Yeo Valley (www.yeovalley.co.uk)

10 mins | Serves **8**

- **12 chard stalks, chopped**
- **50g (¼ cup) Yeo Valley Organic Unsalted Butter**

For the tzatziki

- **1 courgette, grated**
- **350g (1½ cups) Yeo Valley Organic Natural Kefir Yogurt**
- **finely grated zest of ½ a lemon**
- **10g (½ cup) mint, chopped**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper**

To serve (optional)

- **cooked beetroot**

1 Grate the courgette and place it in a clean tea towel. Squeeze out as much moisture as possible to prevent the tzatziki from becoming watery. Transfer to a mixing bowl.

2 Add the kefir, lemon zest and freshly chopped mint to the bowl with the courgette. Season to taste, then stir everything together until well combined.

3 Heat a small frying pan over a medium heat and melt the butter. Add the chard and fry for 5 minutes until lightly golden.

4 Spread the courgette tzatziki onto a serving plate. Arrange the buttery chard stalks on top, along with some roasted beetroot for added flavour and colour, if desired.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've included plain yoghurt in your diet

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Document how a helping of yoghurt affects your wellbeing

I included more yoghurt in my diet by...

On the days I ate yoghurt my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Purple sprouting broccoli

This delicious broccoli variant provides a healthy dose of fibre, antioxidants and beneficial compounds, which supports a healthy gut microbiome.

Why are they great?

Purple sprouting broccoli is rich in fibre which helps regulate digestion, feed beneficial gut bacteria and prevent constipation. The antioxidants in broccoli also reduce inflammation, supporting a healthy gut lining.

DAY 9

Today focus on going meat-free

Even small reductions to your meat intake can reap huge rewards

Reducing meat from your diet is one of the biggest steps you can take to improve your gut health – in fact, replacing meat with more plants and plant-based foods can have a huge effect on your overall health, as well as positively impact your future health. Red meat, specifically, has been linked to a higher risk of some cancers and of cardiovascular disease as a result of toxins produced in the gut.

If you're a keen meat-eater, rest assured that it's much easier than you might think to add variety to your diet, and there are lots of delicious recipes you can try that might have you second-guessing whether meat is included, and will definitely have you increasing the number of meals and days when you go meat-free. Plus, an added bonus is that veganism and plant-based choices are incredibly popular, so whether you're doing your weekly shop or going out for a posh meal, you'll find plenty of options to suit all tastes.

How much you should be doing

Going meat-free can be a tricky one to consider if you're a confirmed meat-eater, so start with one day a week until you're comfortable and happy with your menu choices before adding days to your week. Ideally, you'll want to build up to two days a week by the end of the month. Think about some simple swaps: vegetarian sausages instead of your usual brand, tofu instead of chicken in your stir-fry, or puy lentils in your Bolognese.

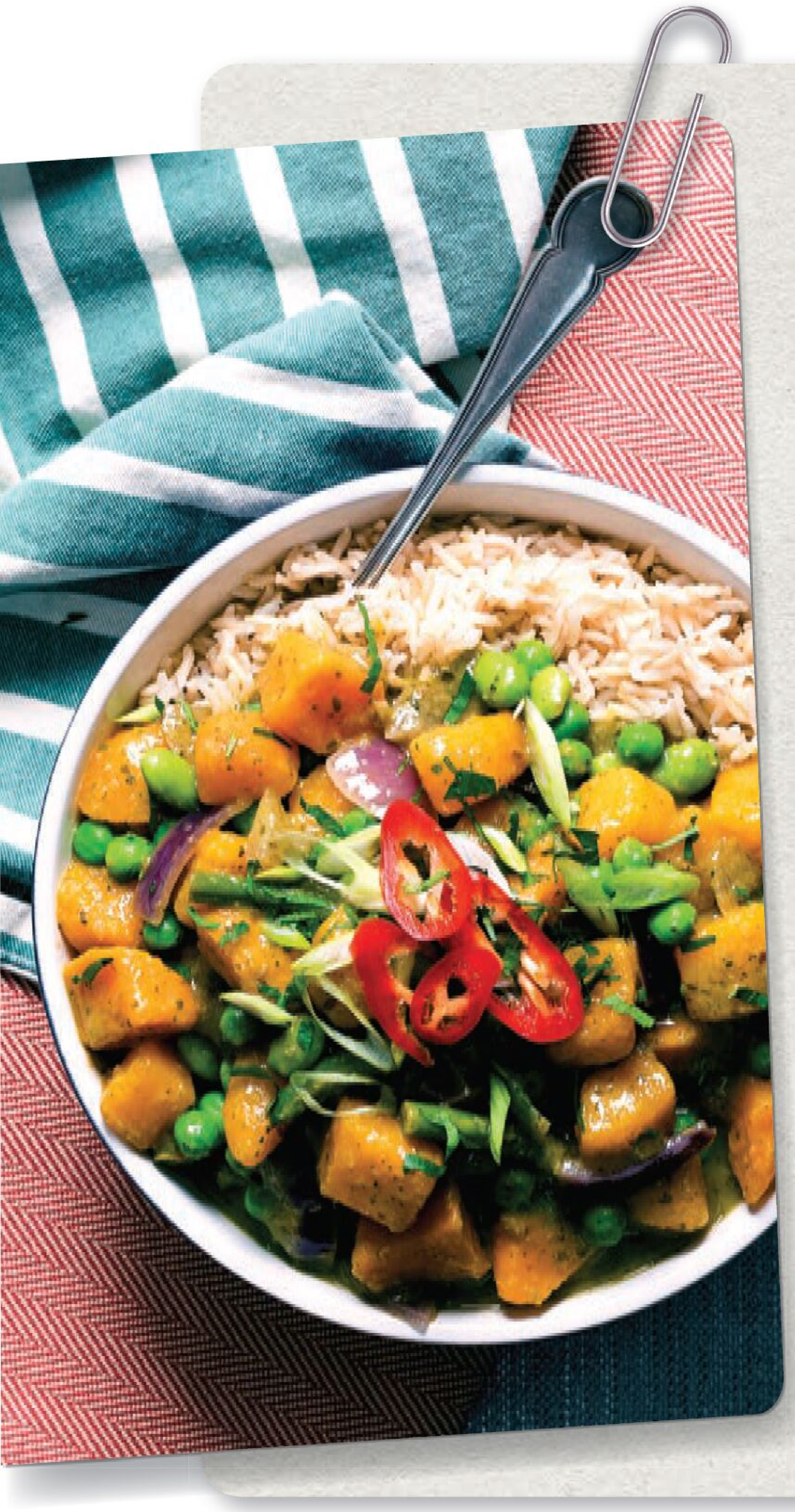
Make it easy

Chickpeas are a brilliant way to add flavour and protein to curries and stews.

4 *creative ways* to eat less meat

Give it a go – you won't even notice the difference

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Don't go all out!	You don't need to be instantly vegetarian – one day a week will make a huge difference to your gut and overall health. Keep it achievable and build from there.
Check the freezer aisle	You'll be surprised at the amount of plant-based meals and meat substitutes there are.
Focus on what you already eat	You probably eat plenty of vegetarian meals already (cheese on toast, anyone?), so don't think you have to be super creative for every meal.
Try one new recipe a week	Again, it doesn't need to be cordon bleu; what about the one we've got here?



RECIPE OF THE DAY

Thai green curry

This super tasty curry is a real winter-warmer: you won't miss the meat!

Serves **4**

Prep **15 mins** | Cook **15 mins**

1. Blend all the curry paste ingredients together until smooth.
2. For the curry, add the butternut squash to a pan of boiling water and cook for 6-8 minutes, until softened.
3. In a large pan over a medium-high heat, add the vegetable oil, red onion, green beans, stock cube and curry paste and cook for 3-4 minutes until the onion begins to soften. Add the coconut milk and bring to the boil, then turn down and simmer for 6-8 minutes. Add the peas, edamame and butternut squash and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.
4. Top with spring onions, coriander and red chilli before serving.

For the curry paste

1 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 white onion, peeled, chopped
2 green chillies
3 garlic cloves, peeled
2 tbsp grated ginger
1 lemongrass stalk, chopped
finely grated zest and juice of 1 lime
a handful of coriander, chopped
a handful of Thai basil, chopped
4 kaffir lime leaves, dried
1 tbsp miso paste

For the curry

½ a butternut squash, chopped
2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 red onion, peeled, chopped
200g (1⅓ cups) green beans
1 gluten-free vegetable stock cube
2 x 400ml (14fl oz) tinned coconut milk
200g (1⅓ cups) peas
200g (2⅔ cups) edamame beans
a bunch of spring onions, sliced
a handful of coriander, chopped
1 red chilli, finely sliced

Habit tracker

Aim to have at least two non-meat days a week

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Document your non-meat days and record your experiences

On the days I ate no meat I felt...

On the days I ate no meat my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Mushrooms

How many?

Use a 200g punnet of mushrooms finely chopped instead of a pack of mince for your Bolognese or lasagne.

Why are they great?

These nutritional powerhouses can lower your cholesterol, protect your brain health and help maintain a healthy blood pressure as well as promote gut health.

DAY 10

Today focus on chickpeas

Boasting a low GI and packed full of protein, the chickpea is your gut-friendly superhero

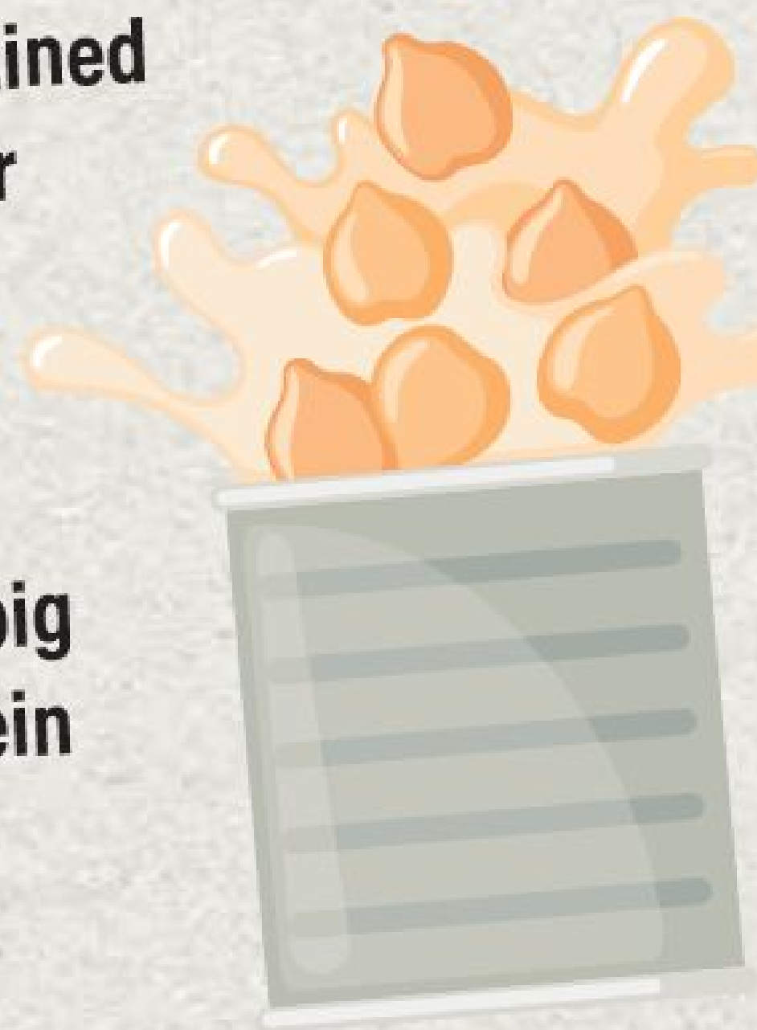
We told you some of the days would be easy, didn't we?! Chickpeas are a versatile legume that are low in fat, high in soluble fibre, a great source of protein, B vitamins and manganese. Chickpeas are also gentle on the stomach, making them a great option for those with sensitive tummies. Their unique combination of soluble and insoluble fibre supports gut motility while reducing inflammation. Plus, they're versatile and delicious—blend them into creamy hummus, toss them into a salad, or roast them for a crunchy snack. You can stir them into soups, stews, or curries for added heartiness, or mash them into patties for homemade falafels or veggie burgers. Chickpeas even work in desserts—try them in cookie dough or brownies for a healthy twist, and when you buy them tinned, don't chuck out the liquid they come in: this is called aquafaba, and magically whisks up just like egg whites, and can be used for salad dressings, marshmallows, and even gorgeously crisp meringues. They are also wallet friendly, whether you choose the dried variety or those tinned in water. Additionally, they are a great source of calcium for those who avoid dairy.

How much should I be eating?

About 120-200g – that's about half a tin – will give you up to 12g of fibre; that's about the same as a whole large sweet potato! All this fibre will help regulate bowel movements, feed your friendly gut bacteria and support your overall digestive health. Chickpeas are also packed with prebiotics – so move over blueberries, we've found the latest superfood!

Make it easy

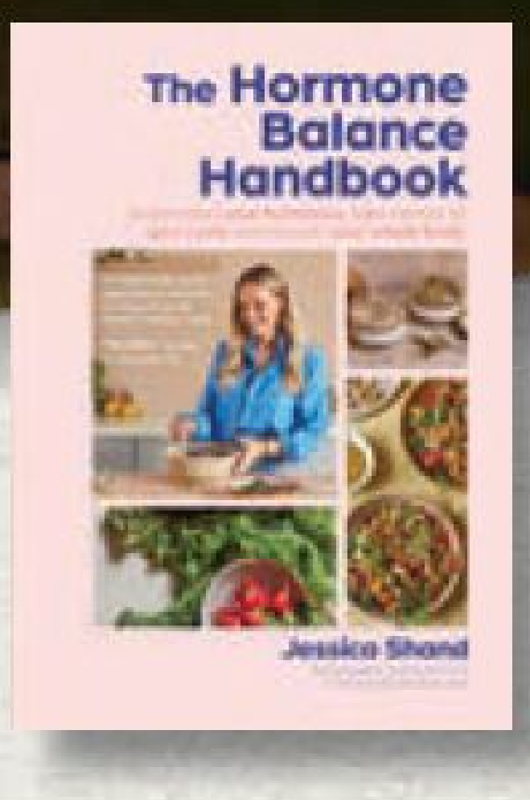
Chuck a drained tin into your stir fry instead of chicken or beef for a big hit of protein and fibre



4 *creative ways* to eat more chickpeas

From main meals to super snacks, the chickpea can do it all

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Nutrition boost	Try adding them as a protein source to a traditional ratatouille and serve with a jacket potato for a nutritious and balanced meal.
Super snacks	Try roasting them with some olive oil, sprinkled with salt and chilli flakes and serve as pre-dinner nibbles or as an alternative savoury snack to crisps.
Family favourite swap	Swap the mince for chickpeas and black beans to make a chilli. Serve with brown rice for additional fibre as a great meal.
Don't mess around!	Drain from the tin, add them straight to a salad and top with balsamic vinegar.


The Hormone Balance Handbook
Jessica Shand

Recipe taken from *The Hormone Balance Handbook* by Jessica Shand, published by HarperCollins, £22.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Herby Greek olive chickpea couscous salad

A super tasty salad that stands as a meal on its own

Serves **4**
Prep **20 mins** | Cook **10 mins**

For the couscous
- 475ml (2 cups) water
- 225g (1½ cups) pearl couscous
- ½ tsp kosher salt

For the salad
- 424g (1½ cups) tinned chickpeas, drained, rinsed
- 225g (1½ cups) cherry tomatoes, halved
- 8 mini sweet peppers (mix of orange, yellow and red), stems removed, sliced
- 2 Persian cucumbers, quartered lengthwise, sliced (or use 1 English cucumber, quartered lengthwise, sliced)
- 90g (½ cup) Kalamata olives, pitted, chopped
- 90g (½ cup) Castelvetrano green olives, pitted, chopped
- 60g (½ cup) sliced pepperoncini
- 10g (½ cup) basil, chopped
- 10g (½ cup) parsley, chopped
- 25g (¼ cup) red onion, peeled, thinly sliced
- 125g (1 cup) feta, crumbled
- Your preferred vinaigrette dressing

1 Combine the water, couscous and salt in a pan and place over a medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, cover, then simmer for 10 minutes until tender. Drain the excess water, rinse with cold water, drain again, then transfer to a large bowl.

2 In the large bowl with the couscous, add the chickpeas, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, olives, pepperoncini, basil, parsley and red onion and toss. Pour the dressing over everything and use a large spoon or tongs to toss until well combined. Sprinkle over the feta and gently toss again to combine. Serve immediately.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've added chickpeas to your meal

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How did you feel with this change to your diet?

I discovered new ways to eat chickpeas by...

If I substituted chickpeas for meat, I felt...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Blackberries

How many?

150g of blackberries will give you a boost of goodness to benefit your gut health.

Why are they great?

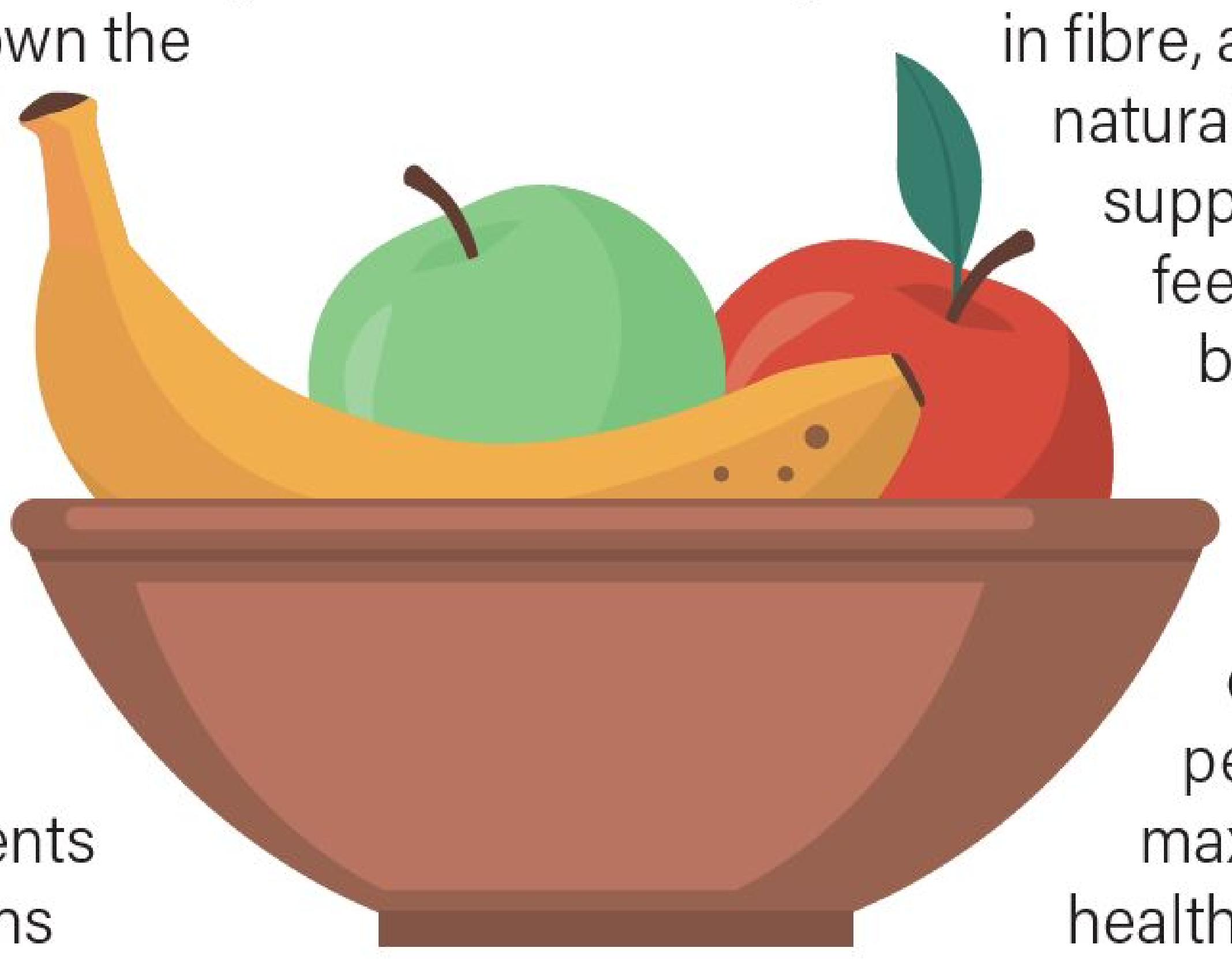
Blackberries are rich in fibre, packed with antioxidents, low in sugar and they're hydrating too.

DAY
11

Today focus on eating whole fruit

Eating whole fruit is an easy way to support your microbiome – just don't juice it!

We all know the benefits of eating fruit. They are a great source of fibre, vitamins, antioxidants and double up as a nutrient-dense snack between meals. However, in recent years, there has been a drive to encourage the intake of fruit through juicing and smoothies. While these are not bad for us per se, when we juice or blend fruit we breakdown the cell wall and thus lose the high fibre benefits. You might believe you're consuming more fruit in this way but, in reality, it's always better to try and eat the whole fruit over juicing. This also prevents blood sugar fluctuations which can in turn have implications to our energy levels and mood.

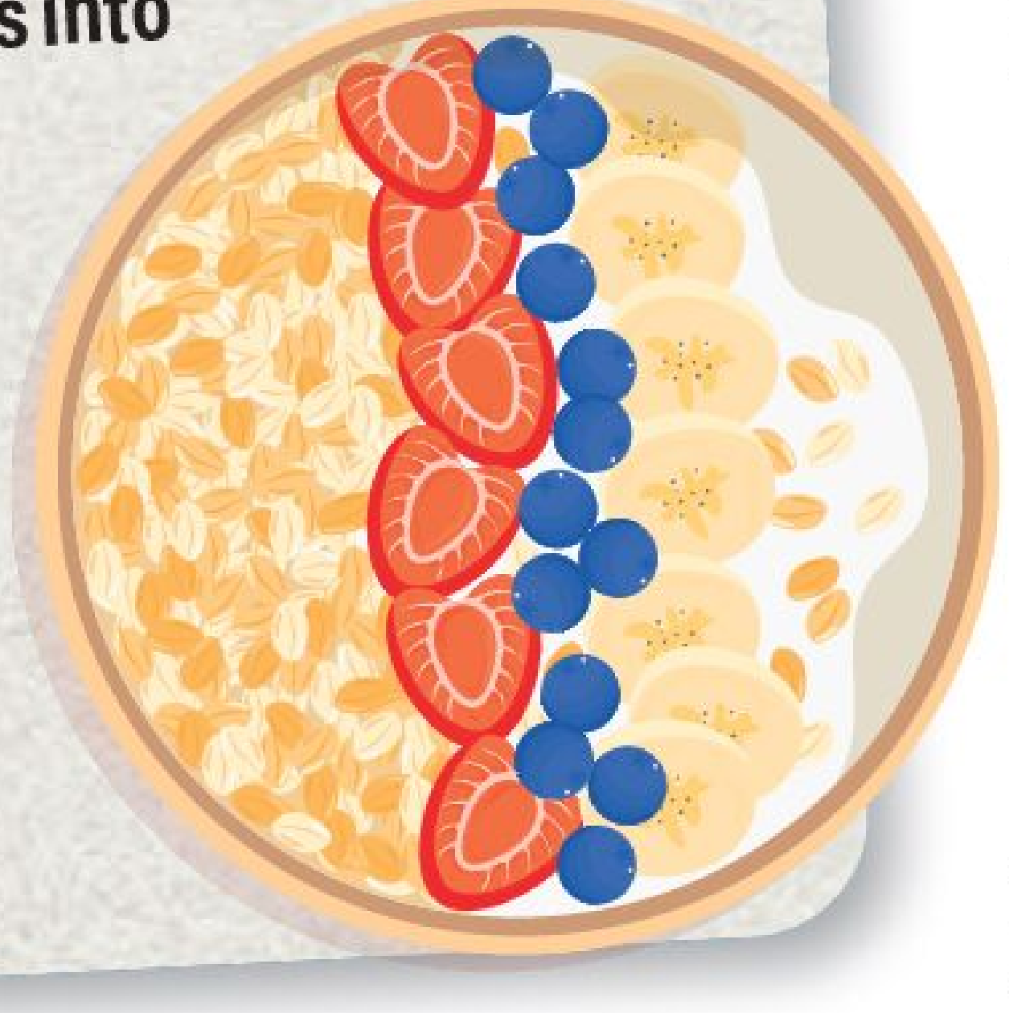


How much should you be eating?

Aim to eat 2-3 servings of whole fruit per day. One serving is typically one medium-sized fruit (eg, an apple, banana or orange), 150g of berries, or 75g of dried fruit. Whole fruits are rich in fibre, antioxidants and natural sugars, which help support healthy digestion, feed beneficial gut bacteria and reduce inflammation. Focus on a variety of fruits, including fibre-rich options like apples, pears and berries to maximise gut health benefits.

Make it easy

Toss fresh berries, sliced bananas, or diced apples into porridge or yogurt for a fibre-packed, gut-friendly start to your day



4 *creative ways* to include more fruit in your diet

Incorporate whole fruit into your daily meal plans for maximum benefits...

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Bulk up meals	Mix a handful of chopped dried apricots into your stew and serve with couscous.
Mix and match	Combine fruit with another food group; for example, apple with cheese or berries with Greek yoghurt.
Frozen is best	Don't forget frozen fruit – this is a great way to eat certain fruit, such as berries or melon when it is out of season. Frozen varieties actually have higher nutrient values as these are preserved on freezing. Frozen fruit is also wallet-friendly.
Creative cooking	Gently stew chopped dessert apples (keeping the peel on) with mixed spice and a squirt of agave to up your breakfast game, or even use as the base of a crumble!

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Tahini & maple syrup granola

Maple syrup adds natural sweetness, while tahini, seeds, nuts and oats pack a real nutritional punch

Servings **8-10** | Prep **15 mins** | Cook **18–22 mins**

2 tbsp coconut oil
2 tbsp maple syrup
2 tbsp light tahini
115g (1¼ cups) jumbo porridge oats
2 tbsp pumpkin seeds
3 tbsp sunflower seeds
40g (¼ cup) Brazil nuts, thickly sliced
40g (¼ cup) almonds, halved
¼ tsp ground cinnamon

To serve
125ml (½ cup) almond milk
½ a banana, peeled, sliced
25g (¼ cup) blueberries

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F, and line an 18x28cm (7 x11in) baking tin non-stick baking paper.
2. Heat the coconut oil, maple syrup and tahini in a pan on a low heat, whisking, until the coconut oil has melted and the mixture is smooth. Remove from the heat and stir in the oats, seeds, nuts and cinnamon.
3. Tip the mixture into the tin, spread evenly, then cook for 10-12 minutes.
4. Remove from the oven, stir, then return to the oven and cook for a further 8-10 minutes, until the granola is evenly coloured and crisp.
5. Leave to cool in the tin, then break into pieces and transfer to a jar or plastic container, seal and store in the fridge up to 5 days.
6. To serve, pour over the milk and top with sliced banana and blueberries.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've switched to whole fruit

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How has eating fruit affected your physical and mental wellbeing?

On the days I ate whole fruit I felt...

On the days I ate whole fruit my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Kale

How much?

200g of versatile kale helps support gut health, providing you with a huge host of nutrients.

Why are they great?

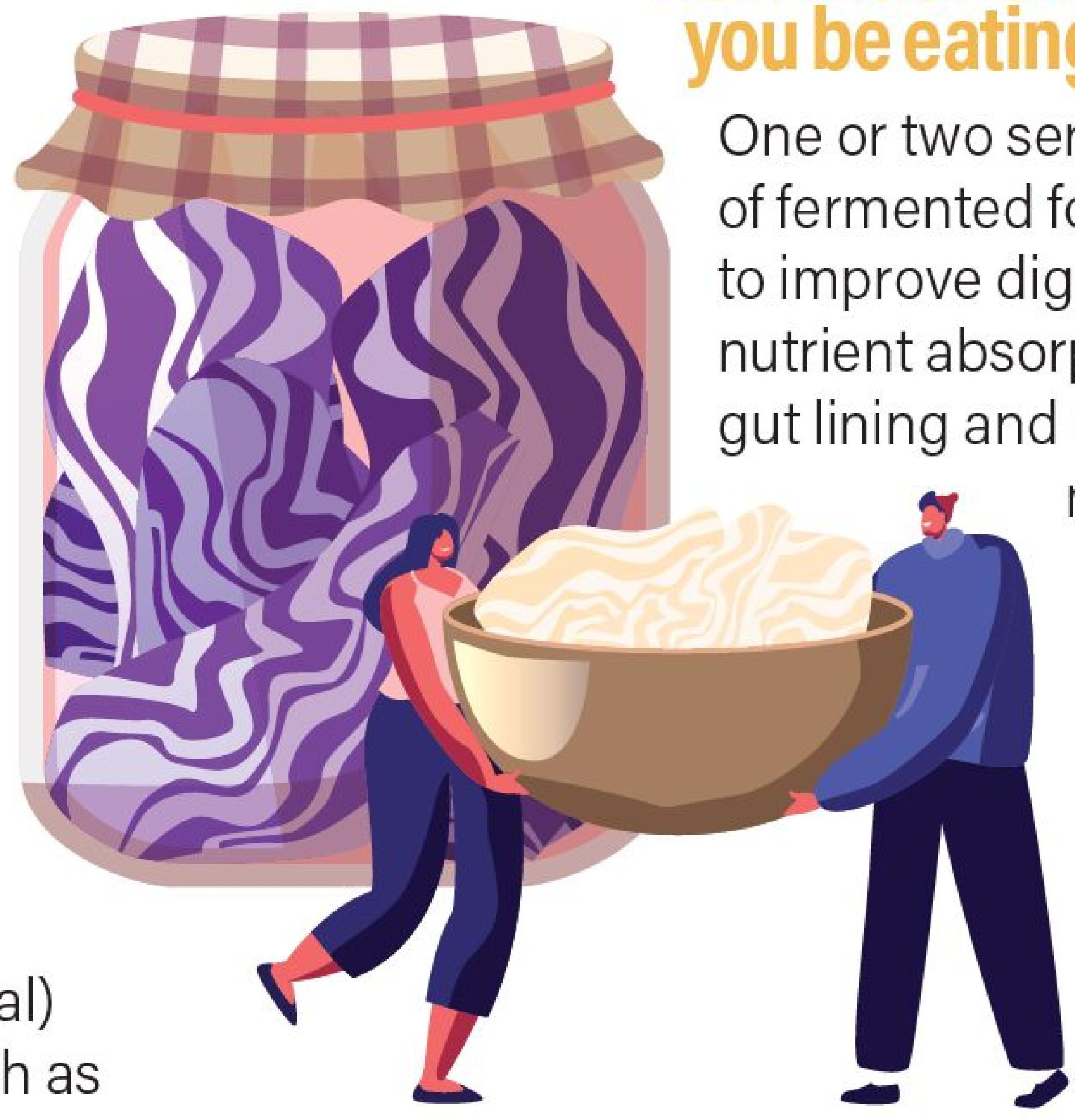
Kale is packed with goodness: it's rich in fibre, packed with prebiotics, and it also includes gut-friendly nutrients like vitamin K and magnesium.

DAY 12

Today focus on fermented food

Improve your gut health by adding a few servings of fermented food to your daily diet

Fermented food is everywhere these days, and for good reason. Those who have made the leap to daily fermented foods can attest to the incredible properties of this piquant food group. A recent study from Stanford University found that eating a diet rich in fermented foods (like yoghurt, kefir and fermented veggies) increased overall microbial diversity in a group of healthy adults. Plus, these foods come with other benefits – yoghurt and kefir are a great source of calcium and protein (ideal in a post-training meal) and fermented veggies such as sauerkraut or a carrot kraut contain fibre and other vitamins and minerals. Some fermented foods, like kimchi or miso, contain antioxidants that reduce gut inflammation and promote overall health.

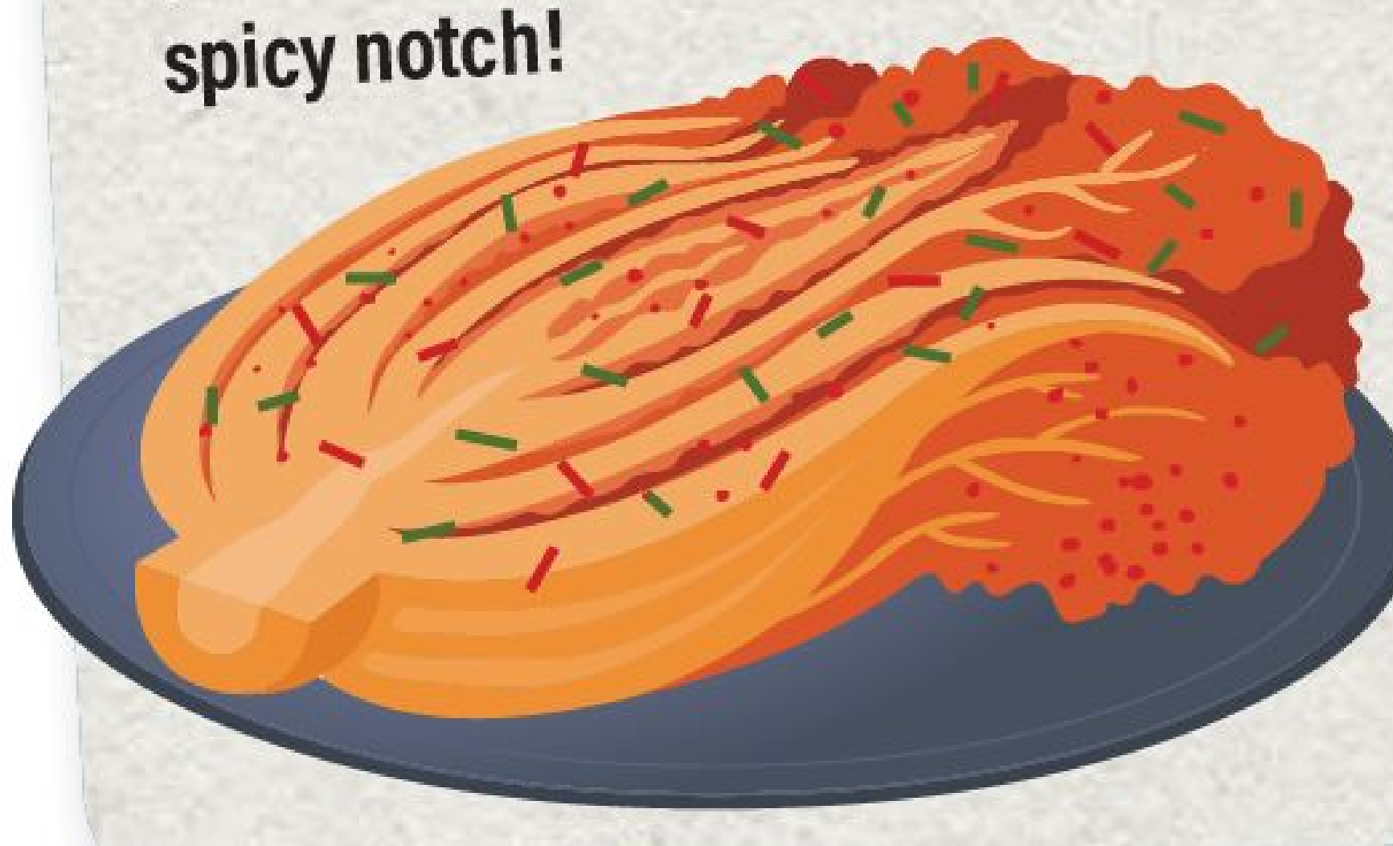


How much should you be eating?

One or two servings a day of fermented food will help to improve digestion, boost nutrient absorption, support your gut lining and regulate bowel movements, but you can build up to this. There are so many different varieties to try, so it's really easy to add into your diet – it's not just sauerkraut!

Make it easy

Pop a tablespoon of kimchi over your stir fry to take things up a spicy notch!



4 *ways* to include fermented food

Use a little creative flair to make fermented food a regular part of your day

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Snack more!	Dip crisps into a tsatsiki made from cultured yoghurt, grated cucumber and a little garlic and lemon.
Make at home	Make your own kombucha at home. All you need is tea, sugar, water, and the all important 'scoby', the culture that works the fermentation magic. These are easy to find online.
Top up!	Chopping gherkins or cornichons (dill pickles) and popping them over lunchtime salads adds crunch as well as that satisfying taste.
Investigate the deli aisle	Use toasted sourdough bread to dip in fermented hummus, and you'll be rewarding your gut with two different sources of fermented food!

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Kimchi

This Korean fermented staple is a great way of preserving veg and adds a delicious kick to your cooking

Makes **2x 750ml jars** | Prep **25 mins + fermenting**

2 medium-sized Chinese cabbages
75g (¼ cup) sea salt
300ml (1¼ cup) water
1 apple, cored and roughly chopped
1 small white onion, roughly chopped
1½ inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
2 carrots (one roughly chopped, the other finely sliced)
2 cloves garlic, peeled
2-3 tbsp Korean chilli powder (gochugaru)
4 spring onions, sliced

1 Prepare the cabbage 24 hours ahead. Make a cross at the top, and pull it into four parts, before chopping into 2-inch sized pieces.

2 Place a third of the cabbage into a large bowl. Sprinkle it with a layer of salt, then repeat this step with the other two-thirds. Place a plate on top, as well as something heavy to weigh it down. Leave overnight.

3 The next day, squeeze the water out, rinse, and leave in the bowl.

4 Combine the water, apple, onion, ginger, the chopped carrot, garlic and 1-2 tablespoons of the gochugaru in a blender and blend until fairly smooth. Pour the paste over the cabbage and mix together.

5 Sprinkle the last tablespoon of gochugaru over the cabbage, as well as the finely sliced carrot and spring onions, and mix well.

6 Layer the kimchi in lidded glass jars, leaving about an inch of room at the top. Top with the remaining kimchi paste and and secure the lid.

7 Allow the kimchi to ferment for 24–36 hours at room temperature. After 24 hours, squeeze it down with a spoon. Taste every 24 hours and place it in the fridge once you're happy with the taste – it should be tangy, spicy and slightly sweet. Use within a month.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've eaten fermented food

DAY 1 ○ DAY 2 ○ DAY 3 ○ DAY 4 ○ DAY 5 ○ DAY 6 ○ DAY 7 ○
DAY 8 ○ DAY 9 ○ DAY 10 ○ DAY 11 ○ DAY 12 ○ DAY 13 ○ DAY 14 ○ DAY 15 ○
DAY 16 ○ DAY 17 ○ DAY 18 ○ DAY 19 ○ DAY 20 ○ DAY 21 ○ DAY 22 ○
DAY 23 ○ DAY 24 ○ DAY 25 ○ DAY 26 ○ DAY 27 ○ DAY 28 ○ DAY 29 ○

Reflection

Make a note of how you feel after fermented food

On the days I ate fermented food I felt...

On the days I ate fermented food my energy levels were...

TURN TO PAGE 98 to find out more about how to make fermented food a daily must-have

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Walnuts

How much?

Delicious walnuts contain fibre, fatty acids and antioxidants, which promote healthy gut bacteria and a diverse microbiome.

Why are they great?

From reducing blood pressure to easing constipation, a handful of these power houses are a fab snack to add to your diet.

DAY 13

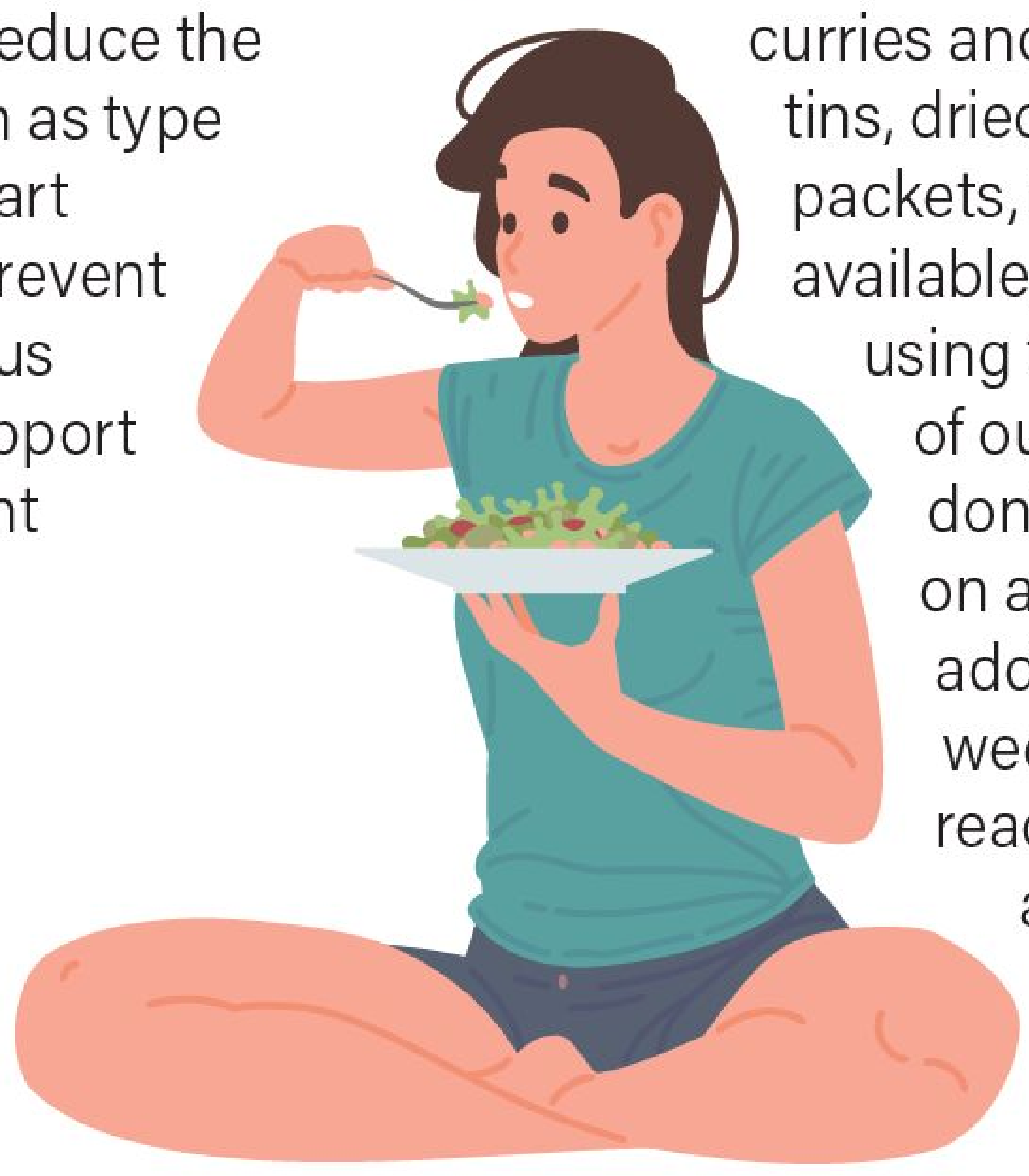
Today focus on eating pulses

Just one portion of pulses provides about a third of the fibre you need for the entire day

Pulses are edible seeds of plants from the legume family. They include chickpeas, lentils, split peas and beans. As we have previously highlighted in earlier healthy behaviours, legumes are a great source of both soluble and insoluble fibre that supports optimal gut biome, while they also reduce the risk of certain diseases such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. They also help to prevent blood sugar fluctuations, thus preventing cravings and support maintaining a healthy weight for height.

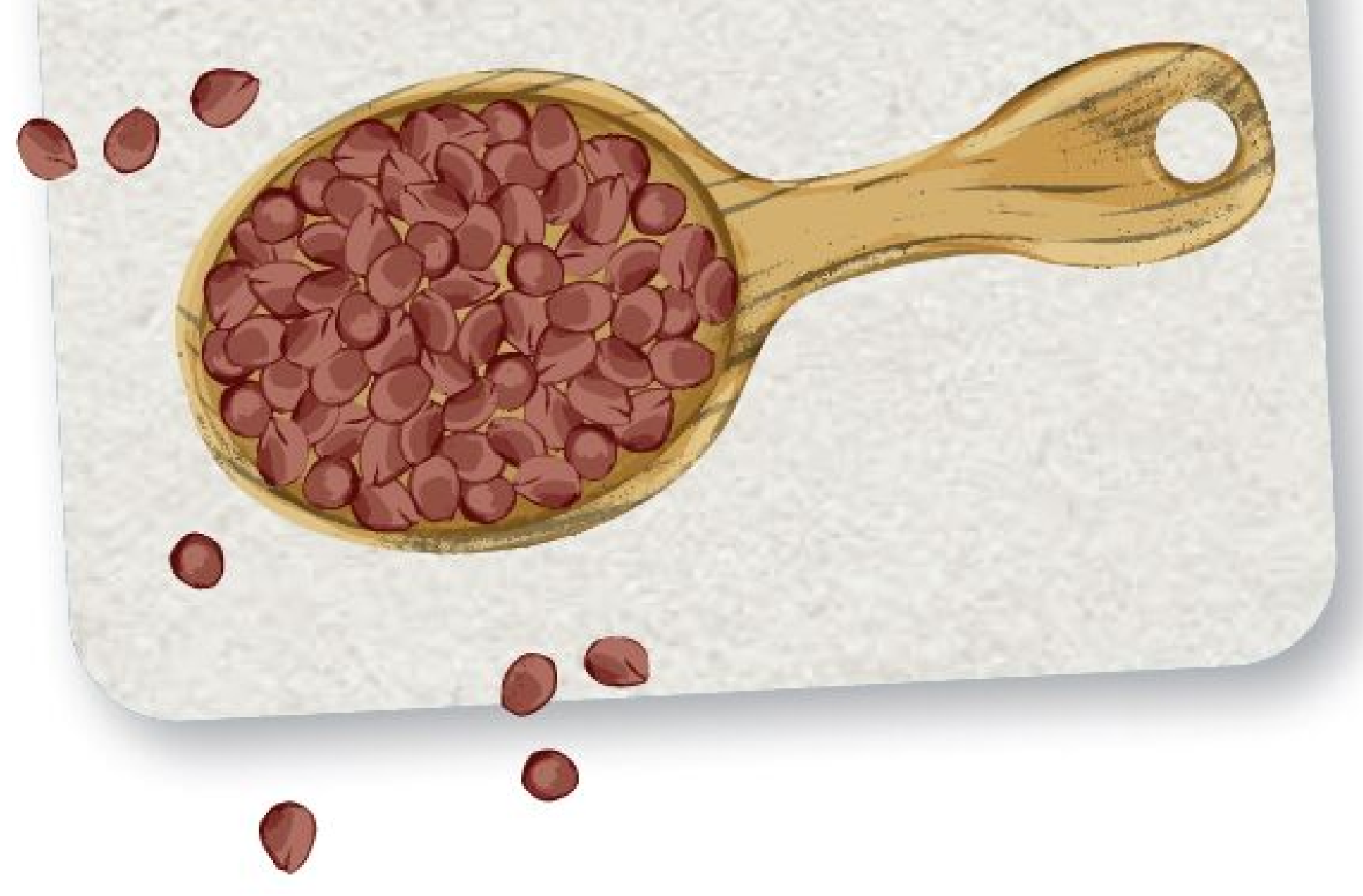
How much should you be eating?

You should look to include pulses as often as you can in your diet. Research indicates about 40 grams of pulses is the recommended daily intake for a balanced diet. You may be overwhelmed at first with how to merge them into your regular meals, but their beauty is that they are versatile and can be used in a number of ways as an alternative (or an addition) to meat in main meals such as stews, casseroles, curries and soups. Available in tins, dried or pre-soaked in packets, there's a huge choice available, and limitless ways of using them. As with many of our daily habits, if you don't already eat legumes on a regular basis, aim to add them to a meal once a week to see how your gut reacts to them, and note any changes in your food journal before increasing your consumption.



Make it easy

Sprinkle pre-cooked lentils over lunchtime salads to add a pleasing bite, and keep you fuller for longer



4 creative ways to include pulses in your diet

A simple pulse addition can elevate a normal meal into a nutrient-dense family favourite...

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Level-up your meals	Add nutrient value to a tin of cream of tomato soup to create a hearty meal. In a frying pan, cook up a variety of preferred vegetables, then add a drained tin of pulses of your choice – black beans make a good option. Mix the tinned soup and vegetable bean mix in a saucepan, heat through, then serve with a chunk of bread.
Do it yourself	Try using butter beans as an alternative to chickpeas and make your own hummus.
Fakeaways	Try chickpeas or black-eyed beans as a base to a burger mix for a vegetarian-friendly option.
Substitute	Cooked red lentils are a great alternative to mince; try them in a lasagne.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Smoky bean chimichangas

Black beans are prized for their high protein and fibre content, and will keep you feeling fuller for longer

Serves **4** | Prep **15 mins** | Cook **20 mins**

- **2 tbsp olive oil**
- **2 onions, peeled, sliced**
- **1 green pepper, deseeded, sliced**
- **1 red pepper, deseeded, sliced**
- **400g (14oz) tinned black beans, drained, rinsed**
- **2 tsp chipotle paste**
- **2 tbsp vegetable oil, plus extra for frying**
- **150g (5½oz) kale, shredded**
- **Juice of 1 orange**
- **4 large tortillas**
- **Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- **Cooked rice, to serve**
- **Salad or salsa, to serve**

1 Heat the olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Fry the onions and peppers for 10-12 minutes, or until the onions are translucent but the peppers are still quite firm. Stir in the beans and chipotle paste, cook for a further minute, then take off the heat.

2 Heat the vegetable oil in a small wok over a high heat. Stir-fry the kale and orange juice for 4 minutes, or until wilted. Season to taste. Divide between the tortillas, making a neat pile in the middle. Top the greens with a layer of the bean mixture, then carefully fold up the sides of the tortillas to make parcels.

3 Heat a little vegetable oil in a pan over a medium heat. Fry the chimichangas briefly on both sides (starting with the side where the folds are visible) until crisp and golden. Serve with rice, salad or salsa.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've added pulses to your meals

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How has adding pulses made you feel today?

On the days I ate pulses I felt...

On the days I ate pulses my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Swiss chard

How much?

This high fibre veg packs a nutritional punch and tastes great too.

Why are they great?

100 grams of Swiss chard offers about 4 grams of fibre, includes vitamins C, E and K, and contains healthy fatty acids.

DAY 14

Today focus on going dairy-free

This could be one of the most rewarding changes you make for your gut

Reducing your dairy intake can have a significant impact on your overall health – replacing dairy with plant-based alternatives can benefit your digestion, energy levels and even long-term wellbeing. Dairy products have been associated with inflammation, skin issues such as excema, respiratory issues such as asthma and sinus problems, as well as bloating and other gastric issues because of lactose intolerance or sensitivity.

If you're a dairy lover, rest assured that transitioning to dairy-free options is easier than ever. There's a wide variety of delicious plant-based alternatives such as almond milk, coconut yoghurt and cashew-based cheeses that can replace your favourite staples. Make sure you keep up with your food diary during days where you go dairy-free, so you can pinpoint any changes to how you feel and look as a result; many people who adjust their diets to eat less dairy report better digestion, reduced joint pain and clearer skin.

How much you should be doing to reap the rewards?

To experience the benefits, even going dairy-free once a week can make a difference, but around 3 or 4 times a week could make that difference really noticeable. Many people report improvements in digestion, energy levels, and overall wellbeing within a few weeks of adopting this partial dairy-free routine.

If you're able to, it might be worth going completely dairy-free for a full month to get a really good idea of how dairy products could be affecting your overall health. Experiment with one dairy-free day to begin with, then take it from there!

Make it easy

If you love your daily latte, switch up dairy for oat milk for a super creamy treat.

4 *creative ways* to reduce your dairy intake

Simple and manageable ways to replace dairy in your meals

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Start small	Try swapping dairy milk for almond or oat milk in your coffee or cereal. Build confidence gradually.
Explore alternatives	Check out the dairy-free section in your supermarket. From plant-based yoghurts to cashew cheese and coconut ice cream, there are endless substitutes to try.
Adapt favourites	You likely already eat meals that can be tweaked to be dairy-free. Swap butter for olive oil or cream for coconut milk in your go-to recipes.
Experiment weekly	Try one new dairy-free recipe a week, such as a vegan mac and cheese or dairy-free pancakes.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Mixed grain salad with baked 'feta'

Replacing traditional feta cheese with this tofu-based alternative makes a simple and delicious salad

Serves **6** | Prep **20 mins** plus chilling | Cook **25-30 mins**

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F.

2 To make the feta, add all the ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth. Shape the mixture into a 2.5cm (1in) thick rectangle on a lined baking tray, then cook in the oven for 25-30 minutes until the sides are well browned. Place the feta in the fridge to cool for 2-3 hours.

3 Once chilled, slice the feta into cubes, then add to all the grain salad ingredients in a bowl and serve.

For the grain salad
A bunch of coriander, chopped
½ a bunch of parsley, chopped
1 red onion, peeled, finely diced
100g (½ cup) freekah, cooked as per the packet instructions
100g (½ cup) quinoa, cooked as per the packet instructions
400g (14oz) tinned green lentils, drained
2 tbsp pumpkin seeds, toasted
2 tbsp flaked almonds, toasted
2 tbsp pine nuts, toasted
2 tbsp capers
75g (½ cup) currants
Juice of 1 lemon
3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Sea salt, to taste
1 pomegranate

For the baked 'feta'
2 tbsp lemon juice
1 garlic clove, peeled
1 tbsp thyme
1 tbsp oregano
1½ tbsp olive oil
1 tsp sea salt
280g (1¼ cups) extra firm tofu, sliced into 6

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've been dairy-free

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How has a dairy-free diet affected your gut and your wellbeing?

On the days I ate no dairy I felt...

On the days I ate no dairy my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Puy lentils

How many?

Use a packet of pre-prepared lentils as the 'meat' in your next curry for a big dose of protein, fibre and micronutrients.

Why are they great?

Nutrient-rich but low in fat, puy lentils are a store cupboard superhero. They help regulate blood sugar, support your cardiovascular health, they're rich in micronutrients such as iron and zinc, and they have a low environmental footprint compared to animal proteins.

DAY 15

Today focus on cutting back on alcohol

Taking a break from drinking alcohol can deliver immediate results

There are many reasons why it's a good idea to check your alcohol intake, and several more good ones to cut back. Before even getting on to your gut, cutting back on the booze can be a really effective way to improve your health, boost your energy, lose weight and save money.

In terms of our gut specifically, alcohol can cause an inflammatory response in the gut and alter the microbiome, which disrupts how the gut functions and impairs nutrient absorption. This can lead to conditions such as leaky gut, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), and gastritis. While regular and/or excessive alcohol intake can lead to these issues, it's worth being mindful of even low and irregular alcohol intake, which can cause problems depending on your sensitivities.

How much should we cut back?

Good question. Many of us will be familiar with the government guidelines that stipulate that men and women shouldn't drink more than 14 units a week. But did you realise how much that is? A unit might be much less than you think, so always check the bottle: a large glass of red wine can contain as many as 3 units (a bottle as much as 12). With that in mind, it's better to be consistent rather than go completely dry – unless you wish to – followed by a binge. So for this week, introduce one more alcohol-free day than you would normally, and increase by another day after a month, until you are regularly only drinking on two days a week at most. If you are a dadaily drinker, you will reap the benefits almost immediately in terms of sleep, overall wellbeing, your mental health and your gut health. It's a tough one but it's a good one.

Make it easy

Tell your friends and family you're cutting back on booze, and ask them for support by meeting up at cafés or the cinema instead of the pub

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ADMIT ONE
123456
ADMIT ONE
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ADMIT ONE
123456

4 *creative ways* to cut back on alcohol

Make the challenge fun with a few simple tips and tricks to help you ditch the booze

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Mind games	Eat breakfast for dinner. Sounds odd, but it works: pile your plate with a nutritious 'breakfast' of scrambled eggs and smashed avocado on toast, and you're more likely to crave a cuppa over a glass of wine.
Universal solvent	Drink more water. Glug a glass of water before every alcoholic drink to reduce the amount you drink and to curtail the detrimental effects of alcohol.
Put it in the journal	Keeping tabs on the drinks you have will ensure you keep on top of your units and stay accountable.
Freeze leftovers	Pour leftover wine into ice cube trays, then simply pop into risottos or stews straight from the freezer. Genius!

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Shredded Asian satay salad

This salad is loaded with liver-loving vegetables

Prep **10** mins | Serves **4**

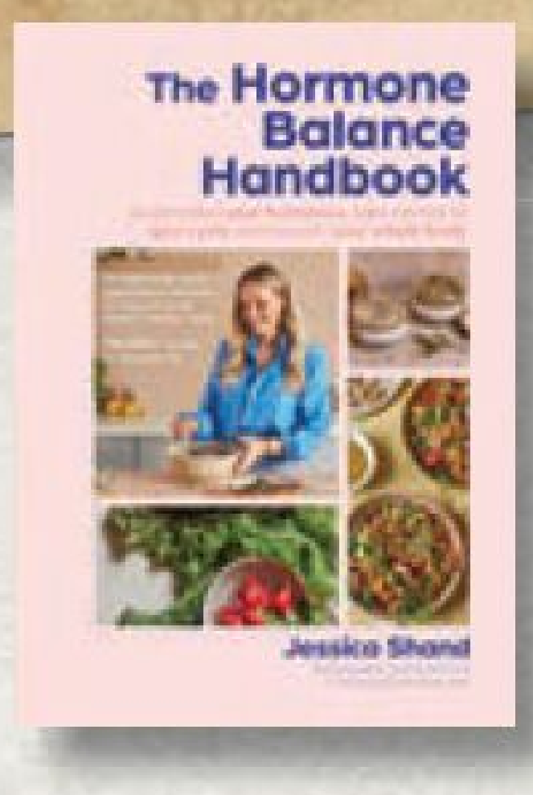
1. Finely shred the cabbage, carrots, Romano pepper and onion using a mandolin, grater or food processor, then transfer to the biggest bowl you have.
2. Combine all the satay sauce ingredients, gradually adding the water and stirring well to achieve a runny consistency.
3. Cook the soba or wholegrain rice noodles according to the packet instructions (or you could sub this for quinoa).
4. Add the noodles to the bowl, along with the kimchi, edamame beans and coriander.
5. Drizzle the satay sauce over the shredded veggies and noodles, then sprinkle with sesame seeds and chopped pistachios.

For the salad

- ½ a red cabbage head
- 2 carrots, peeled
- 1 Romano pepper
- 1 red onion, peeled
- 2 servings of soba noodles or 2 gluten-free wholegrain rice noodle 'nests'
- 3 tbsp kimchi
- 100g (¾ cup) edamame beans
- A handful of fresh coriander
- 2 tbsp black sesame seeds
- 1 tbsp white sesame seeds
- 20g (¾oz) pistachios, chopped

For the zingy satay sauce

- 2 tbsp peanut butter
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled, grated
- Juice of 1 lime
- 2 tbsp cold-pressed toasted sesame oil
- 1 tsp Chinese rice vinegar
- A pinch of dried chilli flakes
- 2 tbsp water, to loosen, as needed



The Hormone Balance Handbook

Jessica Shand

Recipe taken from *The Hormone Balance Handbook* by Jessica Shand, published by HarperCollins, £22.

Habit tracker

Tick off your alcohol-fee days

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How do you feel when you've kept alcohol out of your system?

On the day after I didn't drink I felt...

On the day after I didn't drink my energy levels were...

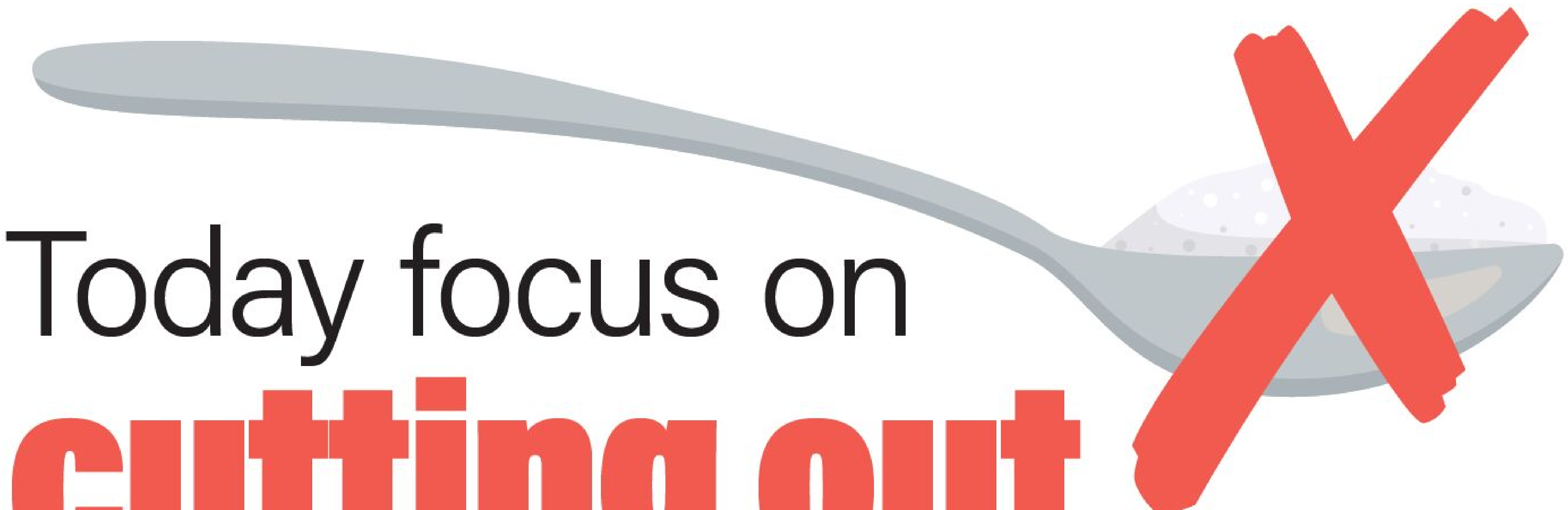
PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Chia seeds

This delicious variant provides a healthy dose of fibre, antioxidants and beneficial compounds, which helps support a healthy gut microbiome.

Why are they great?

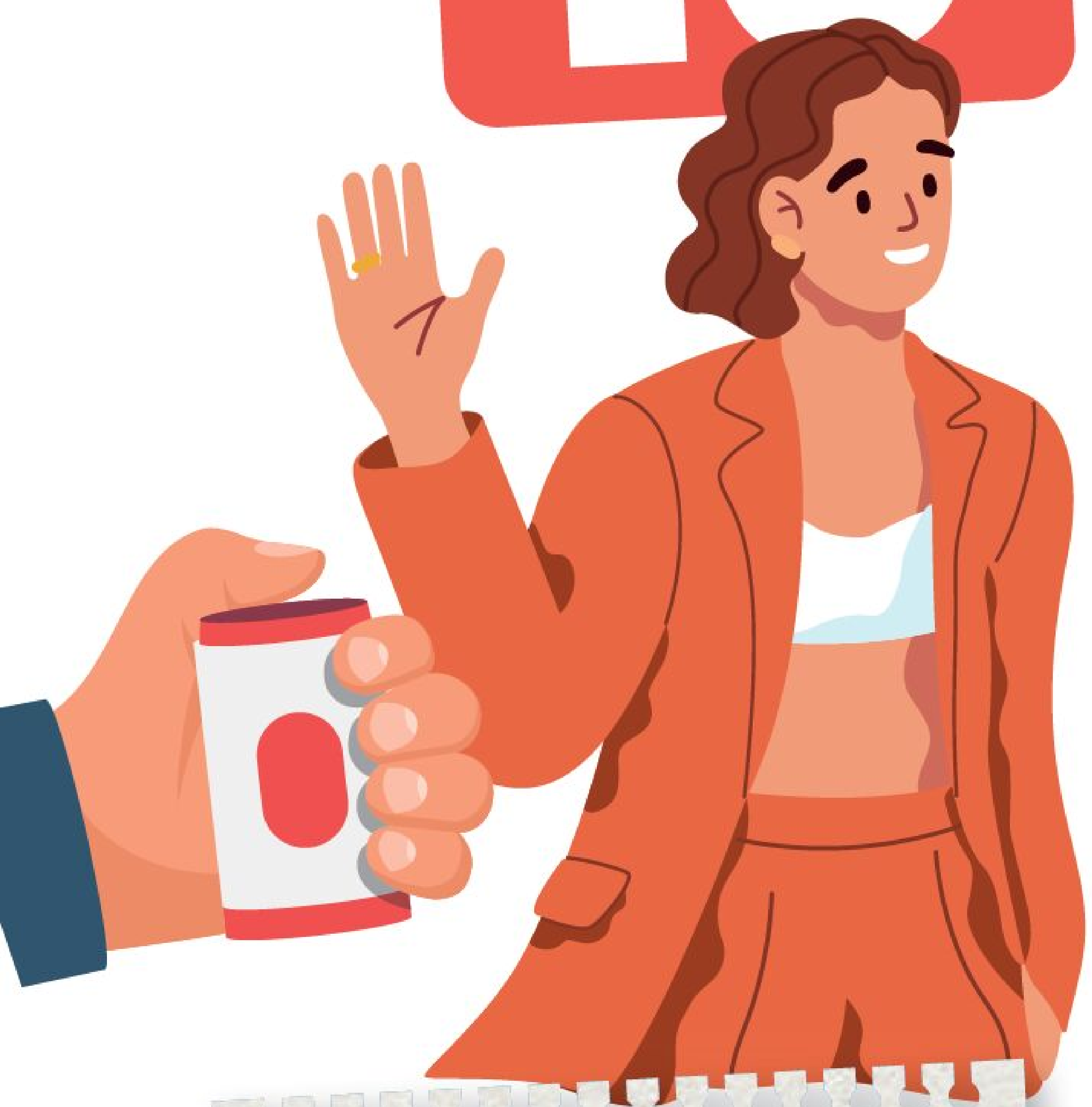
Chia seeds contain antioxidants and they're high in fibre and Omega-3 fatty acids, which can all help to reduce inflammation in the gut.



DAY 16

Today focus on cutting out sweeteners

Give your sweet tooth the same hit it craves with just a few simple and natural changes



Sweeteners have been around for several decades as a substitute to sugar, which helps to reduce the incidence of tooth decay. They are also often used in sugar-free products, recommended to those with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. However, emerging studies are starting to show that long term use of sweeteners, particularly in large quantities, may have negative consequences on health, although more robust evidence is needed. More to the point, recent research has shown that certain sweeteners such as aspartame, sucralose, and saccharin, can significantly alter the gut biome in a negative manner. And those who suffer with IBS have also reported negative side effects after eating sweeteners, such as excessive bloating and flatulence.

How much should we be cutting back?

While sweeteners are still heralded as being healthier than sugar – and for people with diabetes, they can be a useful ingredient – nutrition practitioners report that despite the reduction in energy and calories, they still cause a reliance on sweet-tasting foods.

In the longer run, unless your dietician recommends otherwise, it's best to try and reduce the overall intake of sweet-tasting foods, including those with added sweeteners.

Make it easy

Go Greek and use honey to sweeten your yoghurt instead of buying a sweetened fruit variety

4 *creative ways* to cut back on sweeteners

Natural sugars offer the same sweet hit without the artificial flavour

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Baking help	Experiment with agave in your bakes, which adds natural sweetness without the calories of sugar or the aftertaste of sweeteners.
Plant power	Whizz up dates in your food processor with some warm water for the sweet hit in your flapjacks.
Reach for fruit	Grab a piece of whole fruit when the sugar craving hits, and you'll tick the sweetness box with an added dose of fibre and vitamins.
Mega maple	Maple syrup is sweeter than sugar, which means you can use less of it, and it tastes great with pancakes!

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Chocolate chia fudge with pecans and almonds

Chia seeds are packed with fibre, protein, omega-3 fatty acids and micronutrients

Serves **4** | Prep **5 mins** *plus chilling* | Cook **5 mins**

160ml (⅔ cup) coconut milk

300g (2 cups) dark chocolate

2 tsp coconut oil

1 tbsp nut butter

2 tbsp chopped pecans

2 tbsp chia seeds

1 tbsp maple syrup (optional)

2 tbsp flaked almonds

1. Bring the coconut milk to a simmer, then add the chocolate, coconut oil and nut butter.
2. Remove from the heat and add the rest of the ingredients, then stir until thickened.
3. Pour the mixture into a tin and let it cool slightly. Set in the refrigerator for 2 hours.
4. Chop into bite-sized pieces, sprinkle with flaked almonds, then serve.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've completed this habit

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Consider how it feels when you substitute sweeteners

On the days I removed sweeteners from my meals I felt...

On the days I substituted natural sugars my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Brazil nuts

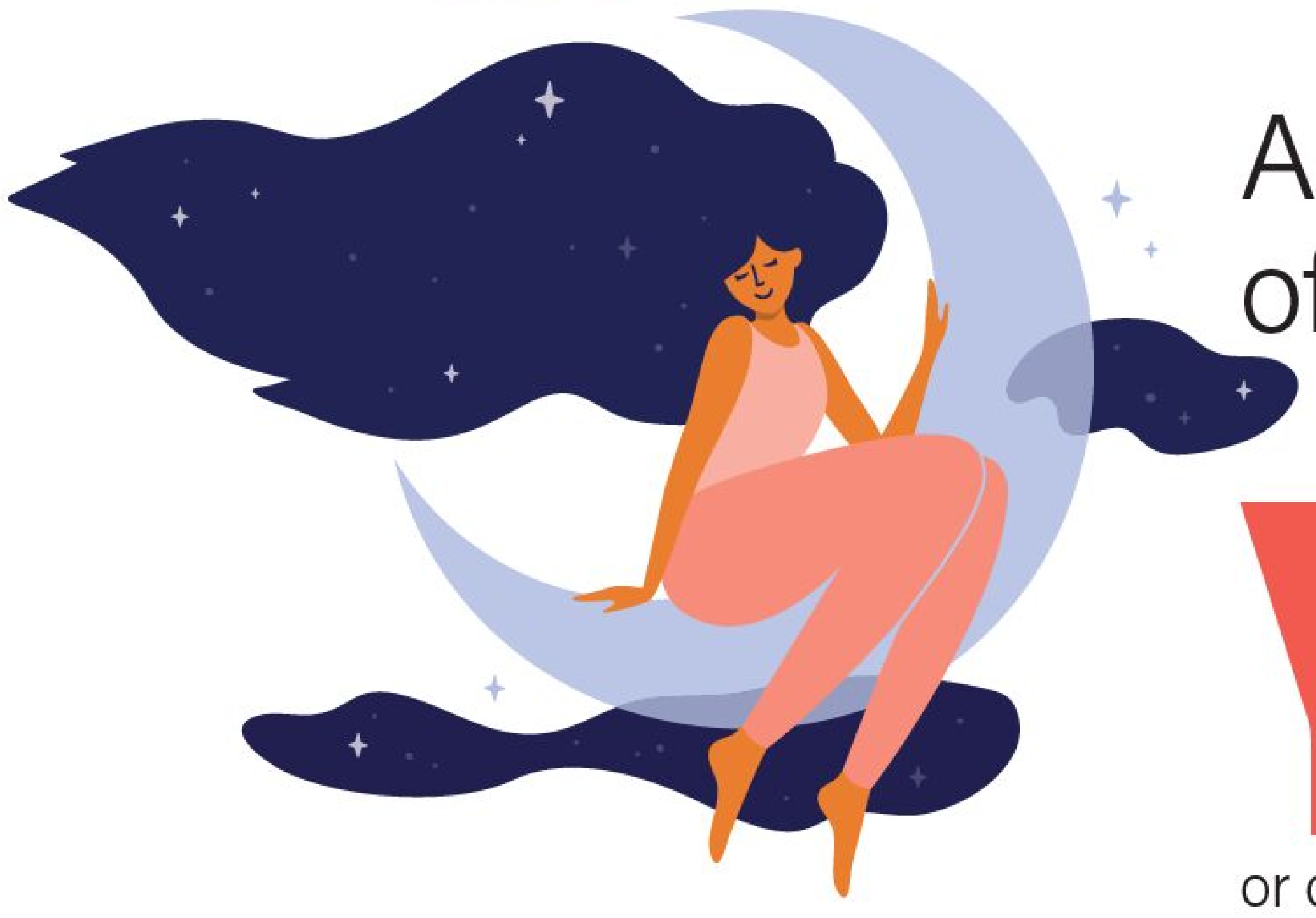
Just a small handful of these nutrient dense nuts pack a powerful nutrition hit, and are a good natural supplement for your health.

Why are they great?

Just five nuts a day will help reduce inflammation and can also help reduce cholesterol. They're also high in fibre, which helps get things moving.

DAY 17

Today focus on good sleep habits



A good night's sleep is an essential part of maintaining great gut health

Make it easy

If your phone has a bedtime mode, schedule it for an hour before you'd like to be asleep, so it turns your screen black and white, which is far less appealing!

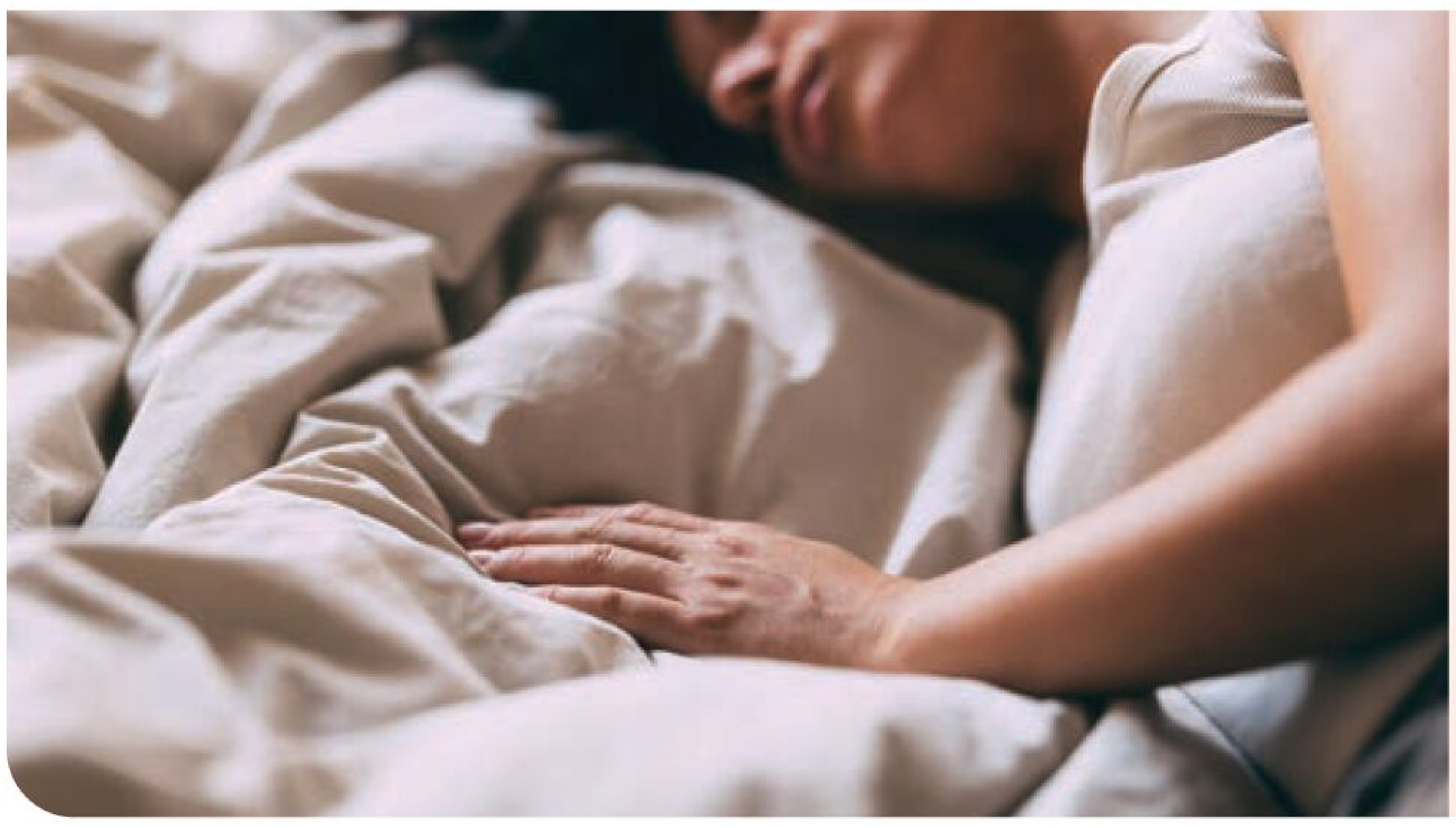
Your gut microbes follow a 'sleep-wake' cycle just like you do, with some microbes more active at night and others during the day. Poor or disrupted sleep – such as shift work, inconsistent sleep patterns, or short sleep – can impact how your microbes function and can reduce gut microbiome diversity. Interestingly, certain beneficial bacteria seem to play a role in supporting good sleep, so keeping the good guys well fed with a plant-forward fibre-rich diet is important. To support good sleep, eat on a regular schedule (not too late at night) and practice good sleep hygiene, such as avoiding caffeine in the afternoon, dimming lights, and switching off devices an hour before bed (see page 104 for more).

How much sleep do we need?

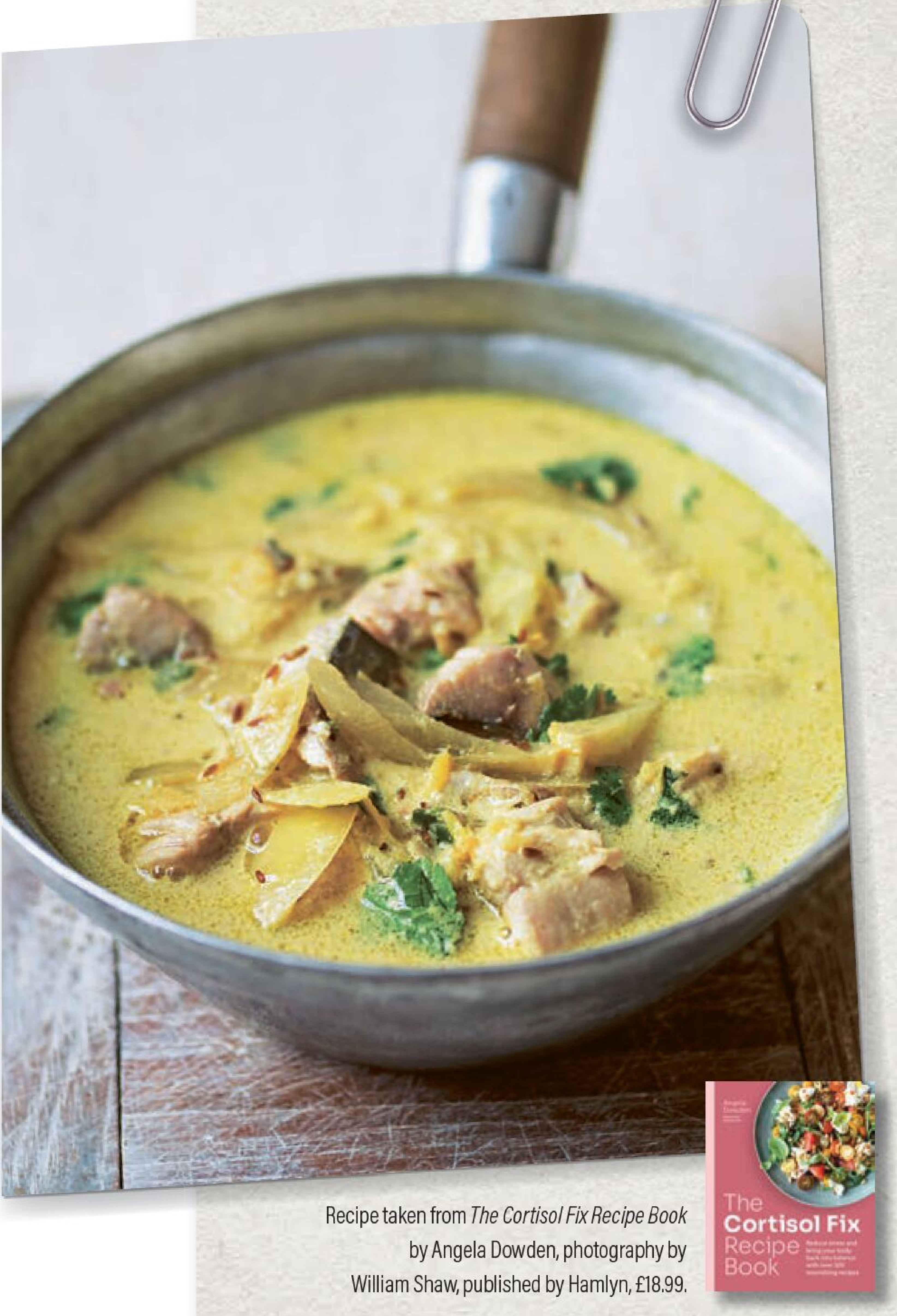
Ideally we need to be aiming for between 7-9 hours a night, but you'll know what's best for you. Getting less than you need can increase stress hormones and inflammation, and it also affects hunger and fullness hormones – it's common to reach for sugary snacks if we're sleep deprived. Some things to do with our sleep are out of our control, so it's important to concentrate on the parts you can control: caffeine, screens, food and consistent bedtimes. We've got lots more information and sleep hygiene tips on page 106, so shoot over there to catch yourself some good-quality Zs.

Make your bedroom a *sanctuary*

Give yourself the best opportunity to achieve the sleep your body needs to function at 100 per cent



A great way to help you nod off is to make your bedroom a calm sanctuary – somewhere you'd actually like to fall asleep in! Clean sheets and a well-made bed are a great start, then think about soft furnishings in soothing colours and comfortable fabrics. You don't need to redesign the whole room – simply upgrading a couple of cushions and a throw can make the difference from a bog-standard bedroom to hotel-standard luxury. Keep your phone outside the door, grab a book, and snuggle up.


Recipe taken from *The Cortisol Fix Recipe Book* by Angela Dowden, photography by William Shaw, published by Hamlyn, £18.99.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Mackerel curry

Mackerel is a great source of omega-3 fats, which stimulate the sleep hormone melatonin

Serves **4** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **15-25 mins**

1 green chilli, deseeded, chopped
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp turmeric
4 garlic cloves, peeled
2.5cm (1in) piece of fresh root ginger, peeled, sliced
1 tsp sunflower oil
1 tbsp coconut oil
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 large onion, peeled, sliced
150ml (¼pt) coconut milk
250ml (1 cup) water
450g (1lb) mackerel fillets, cut into 5cm (2in) pieces
A handful of coriander, torn
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Place the chilli, ground coriander, turmeric, garlic, ginger and sunflower oil in a food processor and blend to make a smooth paste.
2. Heat the coconut oil in a wok over a medium heat, add the spice paste and cumin seeds and cook for 2-3 minutes.
3. Add the onion to the pan and cook for 1-2 minutes, then pour in the coconut milk and water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Add the mackerel pieces to the pan and cook for 6-8 minutes until the fish is cooked through, then stir in the coriander leaves.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've put good sleep hygiene into practice

DAY 1 ○ DAY 2 ○ DAY 3 ○ DAY 4 ○ DAY 5 ○ DAY 6 ○ DAY 7 ○
DAY 8 ○ DAY 9 ○ DAY 10 ○ DAY 11 ○ DAY 12 ○ DAY 13 ○ DAY 14 ○ DAY 15 ○
DAY 16 ○ DAY 17 ○ DAY 18 ○ DAY 19 ○ DAY 20 ○ DAY 21 ○ DAY 22 ○
DAY 23 ○ DAY 24 ○ DAY 25 ○ DAY 26 ○ DAY 27 ○ DAY 28 ○ DAY 29 ○ DAY 30 ○

Reflection

Document your sleep to establish what works best for you

On the nights I put good sleep hygiene into practice, I slept...

On the following days my energy levels were...

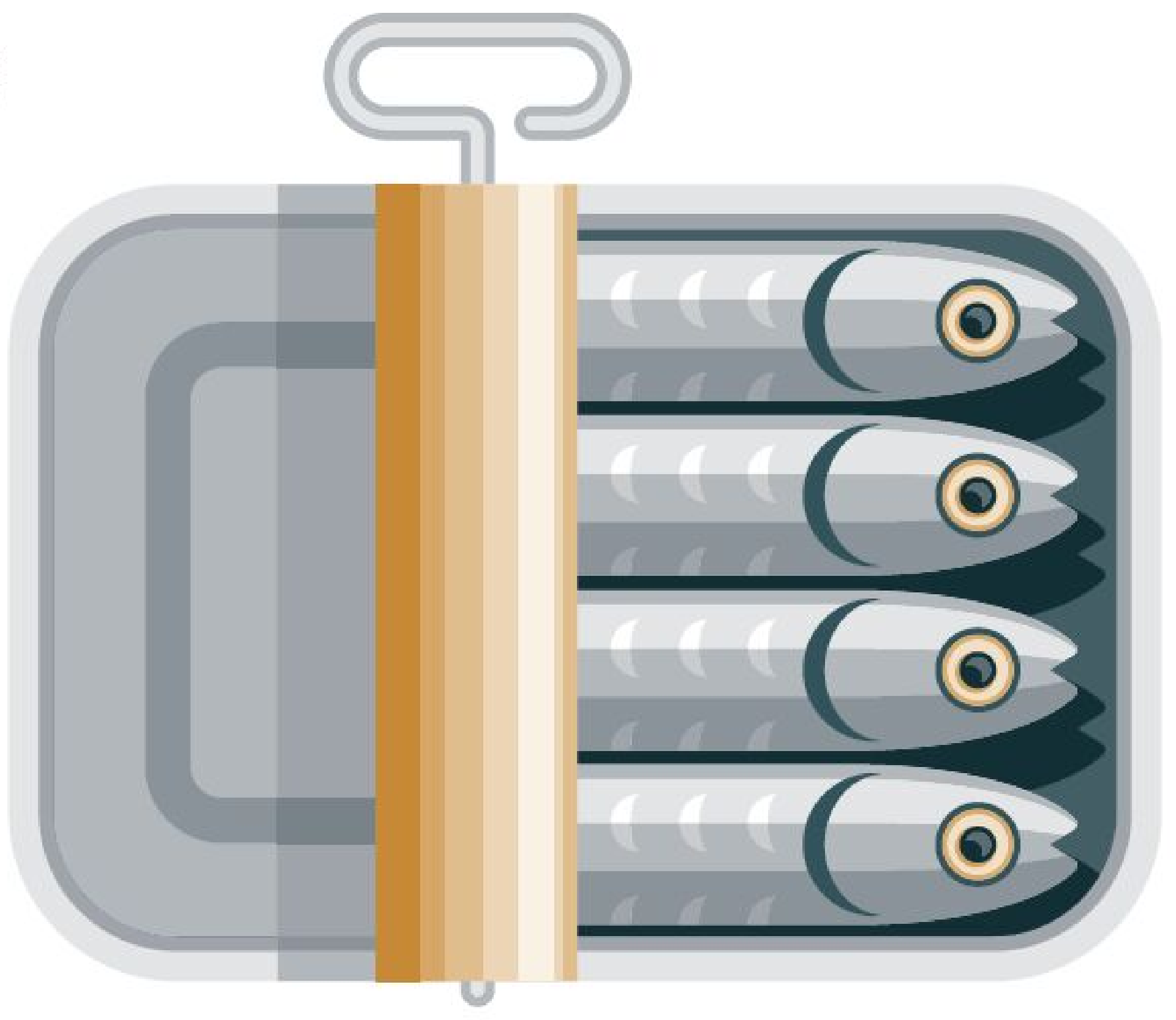
PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Camomile

Camomile is a fab bedtime drink known for improving sleep quality. Like many herbal teas, it works best when you drink it regularly.

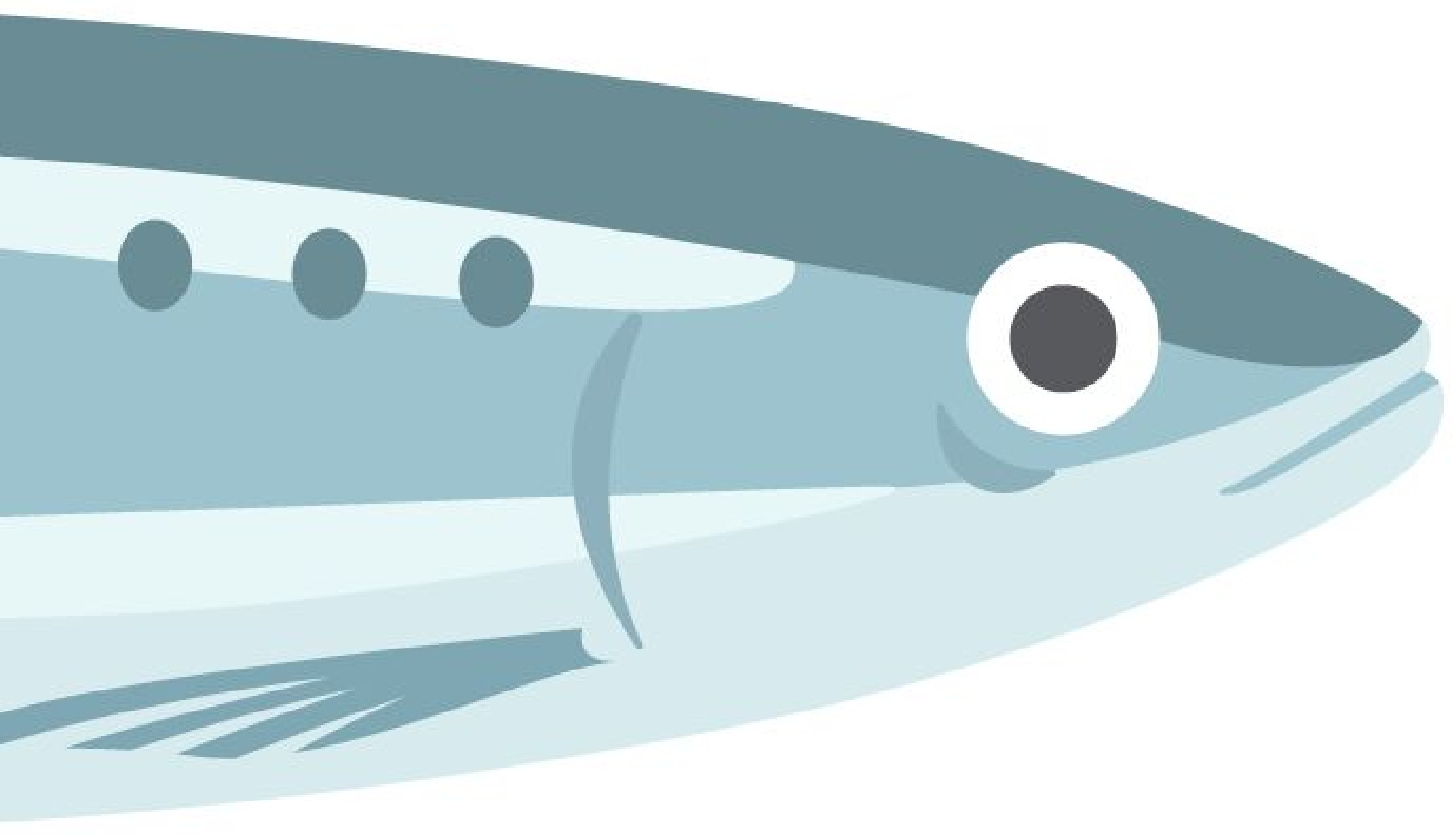
Why is it great?

Camomile contains apigenin, an antioxidant that can help reduce symptoms of insomnia, plus it can also help relax your digestive muscles, helping with indigestion and acid reflux.



DAY 18

Today focus on omega-3s



Omega-3s are a nutrient superhero, and they're awesome for our gut as well!

Omega-3 fatty acids are a group of unsaturated fatty acids. The three main ones are EPA, eicosapentaenoic acid, DHA, docosahexaenoic acid and ALA, alpha-linolenic acid. If you take fish oil supplements, you will see that EPA and DHA are the main components and they are the fatty acids most often associated with health benefits. Indeed, this is also why oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, and kippers are encouraged as part of a healthy balanced diet as they are great sources of EPA and DHA. ALA is predominantly found in plant-based sources such as linseeds, chia seeds, flaxseeds and walnuts. They have been linked to numerous health benefits including supporting our cardiovascular system, reducing the risk of coronary heart disease, lowering blood pressure, preventing and alleviating dementia, depression, asthma, migraine and diabetes, and they're good for our gut as well!

Gut benefits

Adding omega-3s to our diet has been shown to increase the diversity of healthy gut bacteria, plus they may help improve the integrity of the intestinal barrier, and also reduce inflammation. Basically these are the good guys – you can do no wrong with omega-3s and daily consumption will only lead to a healthier gut.

Oil of choice

Use rapeseed oil when making muffins – it has a lovely nutty taste and works brilliantly with both chocolate and spiced varieties

4 *creative ways* to include omega-3s

Experiment with different foods to up your intake of essential omega-3s

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Keep it simple	You don't need to buy high-cost fresh fish, like salmon: tinned sardines and pilchards are packed with omega-3s and delicious on toast.
Delicious toppings	Try sprinkling walnuts onto porridge or salads.
Added texture	Add ground flax and linseeds to smoothies, yoghurt or overnight oats: they taste delicious (even more so if you lightly toast them) and they'll keep you fuller for longer too.
Healthier options	Banish the burgers on the BBQ and pop on mackerel fillets instead – delicious in a bun with a dollop of mayo!

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Sweet chilli salmon bites with garlic broccoli

Salmon is rich in omega-3 fatty acids and goes a long way mixed with crunchy veg

Serves **2** | Prep **5 mins** *plus marinating* | Cook **15 mins**

2 salmon fillets, skin removed, cut into bite-sized pieces

2 tbsp sweet Thai chilli sauce

1 tbsp soy sauce

juice of ½ a lime

2 garlic cloves, peeled (1 grated, 1 sliced)

100g (3½oz) broccoli, cut into florets

2 spring/green onions, sliced

Olive oil spray

Salt and pepper

NB: If using a conventional oven, roast at 200°C for 8-10 mins, then a further 10 mins.

1 Mix together the chilli, soy sauce, lime juice and grated garlic. Add the salmon and marinate for 10 minutes.

2 Spray the broccoli with olive oil and stir in the sliced garlic, salt and pepper. Cook in an air fryer at 180°C/360°F for 4 minutes, then place the salmon on top of the broccoli and cook for a further 5 minutes.

4 Once the salmon is cooked though, serve sprinkled with spring onions.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've added omega-3s to your meals

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7

DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15

DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22

DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

What effect has eating omega-3s had on my daily wellbeing?

On the days I ate omega-3s I felt...

On the days I ate omega-3s my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Jerusalem artichoke

Beneath its unusual exterior, the Jerusalem artichoke, a species of sunflower native to central North America, is a gut superhero.

Why is it great?

It feeds good gut bacteria, improves the balance of your microbiome and helps regulate bowel movements. Big ticks all round!

Today focus on walking

It's a simple as putting one foot in front of the other, but how do we make it a habit?

Walking is one of the very best and most underrated exercises we can do. Walking can reduce our chances of cardiovascular ill health, it can decrease stress, alleviate symptoms of depression, aid our digestion, lower our weight, strengthen our muscles, and because of all of that – also benefit our gut. All of these incredible things, and yet we take it for granted! So, this week we want to think about increasing the time on our feet in two different ways: upping your steps per day, and also including one specific walk per week.

While you're walking, make sure you look around you and find the beauty in your surroundings – something small and miraculous like fallen leaves, or something else; perhaps the friend you're walking with. If your walk is joyful, you're more likely to want to repeat it!

How much you should be doing

You will probably be aware of the concept aiming for 10,000 steps a day – while for some people that's an easy target, for others it can be tricky to get to. Wherever it sits with you, it's a simple goal to meet, and actually doesn't take very long because all of your existing walking up and down stairs, going to the loo, or making cups of tea soon adds up.

To get to your goal, if you're mostly sedentary at work, set an alarm to go off every hour, then get up and walk for no less than one minute. That's a total of just seven or eight minutes in one working day. Find out how far, and for how long, you need to walk to get to that goal of 10,000, then try and incorporate those steps every day.

As a secondary goal, include a walk of at least 30 minutes once a week outside, in nature. Pop it in the diary, find a route, and drink in the view.

Make it easy

Pop your favourite podcast on your headphones, and walk for the duration – you'll be done before you know it!

4 *creative ways* to incorporate the habit

These simple steps can make walking a pleasure rather than a chore

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Travel	If you take the train or bus to work, get off one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way if you can. Or if you drive, park farther from your destination so you can add on a short walk.
Use your lunch break	Use your lunch break to take a quick walk around your workplace – it doesn't need to be an hour!
Invite a friend	Invite a friend for a walk instead of meeting for coffee. It's sometimes easier to talk about the 'big stuff' while walking side-by-side, and getting out into nature will have a huge positive impact on your mental well-being.
Make a phone call	If you make a lot of phone calls, try and walk while you're making them. The time will soon add up!

RECIPE OF THE DAY

One-pot creamy lemon mustard chicken

Chicken is an excellent source of protein – great for your energy levels

Serves **4-6** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **45 mins**

Vegetable oil spray

150g (5½oz) frozen chopped onion or ½ large leek, finely chopped

500g (1lb 2oz) skinless, boneless chicken thighs, cut into bite-sized pieces

½ tsp ground black pepper

3 tbsp Dijon mustard

700ml (scant 3 cups) gluten-free chicken stock

700–800g (1lb 9oz–1lb 12oz) small to medium potatoes, cut into 2.5cm (1in) chunks

Finely grated zest of 1 lemon and juice of ½ a lemon

1 tsp salt

500g (1lb 2oz) frozen broccoli florets

150g (⅔ cup) cream cheese

3 tbsp cornflour/ cornstarch, mixed with 6 tbsp water

A handful of basil leaves, roughly chopped, to serve

1. Spray the base of a large pan with oil and place over a medium heat. Once hot, add the onion or leek and fry until the onion is browned or the leek has softened. Add the chicken and pepper and fry until sealed.
2. Stir in the mustard, then add the stock, potatoes, lemon zest (reserve a little for serving), lemon juice and salt. Stir and ensure all the potato is submerged under the stock. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes or until the potatoes are cooked.
3. Add the broccoli and cream cheese and simmer for another 5 minutes until the broccoli has completely cooked through, then quickly stir in the starch slurry, which will almost instantly thicken the sauce. Serve sprinkled with basil and the reserved lemon zest.

BUDGET
GLUTEN FREE
BECKY EXCELL

Recipe taken from *Budget Gluten Free* by Becky Excell, photography by Hannah Hughes, published by Quadrille, £20.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've enjoyed a walk

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Make a note of how you felt after adding a walk to your day

On the days I walked further I felt...

For the rest of the day, my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Dried apricots

How many?

Four or five apricots provide 3-4 grams of fibre. Try chopping them up and mixing with granola over yoghurt for a nutrient-packed breakfast.

Why are they great?

High in fibre and naturally sweet, these are a great snack to carry with you on your walks to give you a boost of energy while supporting your digestion.

Today focus on herbs & spices

Make your meals dance with flavour while also boosting your gut health – win-win!

Herbs and spices benefit the body beyond just adding flavouring to your cooking. Each one is rich in phytochemicals which have antioxidant properties, protecting cells from damage and reducing inflammation.

Which ones should I think about adding?

There are lots of incredible spices and herbs to explore, and many of them have benefits for our gut health. Spices like turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, peppermint, licorice root and oregano can help reduce inflammation in the gut. Again, ginger (a bit of an all-round hero) can help with bloating and digestive discomfort. Capsaicin, something you'll find in spicy foods, could potentially prevent ulcers. And spices in general contain those very useful prebiotics that promote healthy gut bacteria.

For fresh herbs, it's best to add them towards the end of cooking to preserve their delicate flavours. When using dried spices, toast lightly in a pan before using to enhance their aroma and taste. A little goes a long way, so start with a small amount and taste as you go to avoid overpowering your dish. Better still, even though you're only using a sprinkle of them here and there, they all add up to your 30 plants a week!

Make it easy

If you love the taste of sweet spices like cinnamon and nutmeg in your baking, simply add a little more!

4 *creative ways* to include herbs and spices

Elevate your food and drink with just a simple spicy addition

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Small changes, big results	Half a teaspoon of ground cumin will transform blended vegetables into a tasty curried soup.
Comforting	Steeping a bit of grated turmeric in hot water makes a tasty tea to soothe your gut.
Spice it up	Pop in a pinch of paprika to your spag bol to make it even more delicious.
Elevate the favourites	Sprinkle over cinnamon or nutmeg (or both!) for a scrumptious porridge upgrade.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Goan-style fish curry

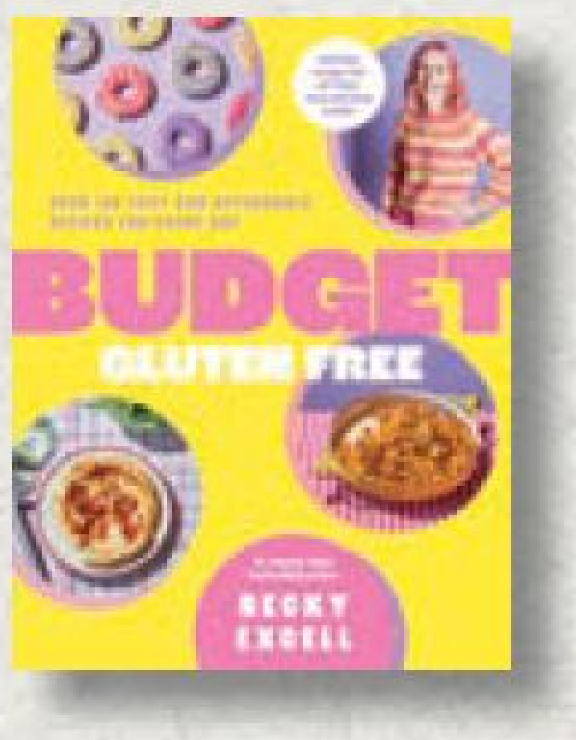
Featuring several spices, this curry is packed full of healthy antioxidants

Serves **3-4** | Prep **5 mins** | Cook **35 mins**

Vegetable oil spray
300g (3 cups) frozen cauliflower florets
300g (3 cups) frozen broccoli florets
1 onion, finely chopped
400g tinned coconut milk
520g (2 cups) frozen white fish fillets
A small handful of coriander/cilantro, roughly chopped

For the paste
½ tsp dried chilli flakes
1 tsp tamarind paste
1 tbsp ginger paste
1 tbsp tomato purée
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 tsp mild curry powder
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
1 tsp salt

Recipe taken from *Budget Gluten Free* by Becky Excell, photography by Hannah Hughes, published by Quadrille, £20.



1 Combine the curry paste ingredients in a bowl and set aside.

2 Preheat the oven to 200°C. Spray a baking tray with vegetable oil. Add the cauliflower and broccoli to the tray, spray with oil and cook for 30-35 minutes, turning halfway through, until lightly blackened in places and fork-tender.

3 Meanwhile, spray a large pan with oil and place over a medium heat. Once hot, add the onion and fry until browned. Add the curry paste and fry for 30 seconds or until fragrant, then add a third of the coconut milk and stir well.

4 Bring to a boil before stirring in the rest of the coconut milk. Add the fish, cover and reduce the heat to low-medium for 10 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through. Remove the lid and break the fillets into bite-sized chunks.

5 Take off the heat and allow to cool for 10 minutes. Stir in the roasted veg just before serving. Sprinkle over the coriander to serve.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've eaten more herbs and spices

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Describe how adding herbs and spices affected your meals

On the days I added more flavour to my food, I felt...

The meals this has transformed for the better are...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Bok choy

Bok choy is a Chinese cabbage, similar to napa cabbage or Swiss chard, and its delicious versatile leaves can be eaten raw or popped into stir-fries.

Why is it great?

Bok choy is fibre-rich and also contains vitamins C and K, as well as minerals and antioxidents.

Today focus on reducing stress

Give your gut the best chance to stay healthy by keeping on top of your stress levels

What's the connection between stress and our gut? Stress can manifest itself in many ways from the way we manage our emotions, as well as dictate the foods we reach for, and how they affect us. This is because stress isn't simply something that's 'going on in your head' – it translates to many physical symptoms as well.

In terms of our gut, stress triggers a physiological response in the body that diverts resources away from digestion – this is because during these periods your brain activates the sympathetic nervous system to prepare your body to protect itself against danger.

When stress levels are high, this alters the bacteria in our gut, reducing those that are helpful and increasing those that are not so beneficial. In turn, this means that stress can cause constipation, bloating, pain, upset stomachs, indigestion and acid reflux, while it can also exacerbate the symptoms of conditions such as IBS or Crohn's disease. On top of which, prolonged periods of stress can be extremely damaging for our mental health and our cardiovascular health.

How can we manage it?

Recognising the times and situations that cause stress is the first, and most important step. This is where your journaling will really help – make a note of these situations and see if there are ways in which you can minimise your time having to deal with the things that tend to raise your stress. If you can't – and many of us won't be able to – then we need to work on how to reduce our stress response.

Make it easy!

Try not to let off steam while you're driving! Cursing non-indicators, even under your breath, raises your stress levels and achieves nothing!

4 *creative ways* to help with stress management

Bust your stress levels with simple and attainable tips and tricks

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Take time to be in nature	Take a short stroll, or sit and appreciate the sounds, smells and sights around you.
Document your experience	Research has shown that journaling helps us to process our thoughts in a more appropriate manner, rather than allowing them to ruminate.
Be mindful	When you notice reactivity in your body, try to press pause, take a few breaths and ask yourself, 'what am I believing about myself right now? What do I need to feel okay?'
Remove triggers	If you find yourself more stressed the day after drinking alcohol, consider cutting down more often.

TIM SPECTOR
The Food for Life Cookbook
zoe

Recipe taken from *The Food for Life Cookbook* by Tim Spector, photography by Issy Croker, published by Jonathan Cape, £28.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Chocolate olive oil mousse

Olive oil is great for gut health, while the dark chocolate can help reduce stress

Serves **4** | Prep **15 mins** *plus chilling*

100g (3½oz) dark chocolate (at least 70% cocoa solids), broken into pieces

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling

2 tsp maple syrup

1-2 pinches of salt

140ml (1 cup) aquafaba (liquid from a tin of chickpeas)

150g (5½oz) cherries, stoned

1 Slowly melt the chocolate in a bain-marie. Remove from the heat and add the olive oil, maple syrup and a pinch of salt. Mix to combine.

2 Whisk the aquafaba in the bowl of a stand mixer for 5 minutes, or until stiff peaks form. Stir a spoon of the aquafaba into the chocolate, then add the chocolate mixture to the whisked aquafaba. Use a spoon to gently fold the mixture together.

3 Spoon into glasses and chill for at least 1 hour. Top with cherries, an extra drizzle of olive oil and a pinch of salt.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've successfully managed your stress well

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Take note of the solutions that helped you beat stress

The stressful moments this week were...

I managed them by...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Radicchio

Fibre-rich radicchio, sometimes known as Italian chicory, can give your salads a total taste upgrade, while it's also great to elevate a pasta dish.

Why is it great?

Packed with antioxidents, prebiotic fibres and tons of minerals and vitamins, radicchio is a bit of a taste sensation.

DAY 22

Today focus on nature

Taking time to enjoy nature is hugely beneficial for your whole wellbeing

While we often hear about the benefits of exercising for our mental health, even just being present in nature can illicit the same effect of improving our overall wellbeing. Studies have shown that exposure to nature can increase the diversity of your gut bacteria, and by now you know what a good thing that is.

The great thing about today's focus is that it might not require much of a change to your lifestyle at all. If you live in a rural area or you have a garden, you can start small by appreciating your surroundings. But no matter where you live, when you're outside, be mindful of the nature around you and take notice of the changing seasons, appreciating the beauty in the small things as well as the large – a beautiful view, a special tree, or emerging buds in spring.

How often should I do it?

Spending at least two hours a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. That's worth a 20-minute stroll every day, surely? You might already be doing this on your daily commute, but the trick here is to make sure you're noticing your surroundings mindfully, rather than rushing past and focusing on where you're going. If you don't already have a regular routine that takes you outside most days, try to incorporate a 'commute' even if it's to and from your own front door. You'll reap all the physical and mental benefits and, additionally, exposure to natural light daily can support and regulate your sleep/wake cycles.

Make it easy

If it's raining, find a window and a view and focus on what you can see, from the colour of the leaves to the wildlife.

4 *creative ways* to engage more with nature

Take simple steps to make your engagement with nature part of your daily routine

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Al-fresco dining	Plan a picnic with friends or family. Find a park or green space to enjoy a meal.
Make it social	Meet a friend for coffee, but walk and talk around a park while you sip.
Join a group	Check out local groups that organise walks that help you to explore your surrounding environment.
Volunteer work	Volunteer with charities such as the National Trust or or get involved in campaigns such as Fix Our Fells.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Roasted red pepper and Gruyère egg bites

These bites include the PFF combo – Protein, Fat, and Fibre – to power you through the day

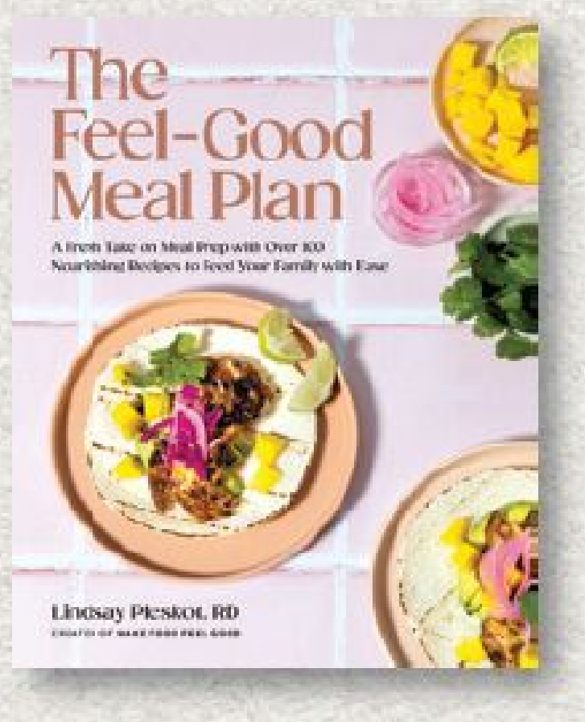
Makes **12** | Prep **5 mins** | Cook **25-30 mins**

8 free-range eggs

225g (1 cup) cottage cheese

235g (1 cup) Gruyère, shredded

130g (¾ cup) roasted red peppers, chopped



Recipe taken from *The Feel-Good Meal Plan* by Lindsay Pleskot, photography by Janis Nicolay, published by Appetite by Random House, £25.

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/ Gas Mark 4. Line a muffin tin with parchment paper baking cups or spray with cooking spray. In a blender, blend the eggs and cottage cheese on high for 30 seconds.
2. Evenly divide three-quarters of the Gruyère and red peppers between the cups Pour in the egg mixture until each cup is two-thirds full, then stir to combine. Top with the remaining Gruyère.
3. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until the tops are set and the egg bites are cooked through. Cool for 5-10 in the tin before serving.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've managed to get out into nature

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Document how these days felt to you

While spending time in nature I felt...

I created more time to go into nature by...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Kohlrabi

This cruciferous vegetable – like broccoli and kale – is packed with goodness to cleanse and reinvigorate your gut.

Why is it great?

Kohlrabi contains fibre along with vitamins C and B6. It's delicious in stir-fries and makes a mean sauerkraut!

DAY 23

Today focus on mindful eating

The simple practice of being thoughtful and present while eating has huge benefits

In the western world, advances in technology mean we are always 'on', with everyone having access to everyone 24/7 and many of us succumbing to the narrative of be more, do more, accomplish more! Research has shown that 30% of workers in the UK choose to eat lunch at their desk, which is the highest rate in Europe.

Mindful eating is a way of eating that involves being fully present and aware of your senses, thoughts and feelings while eating. It's based on the Buddhist concept of mindfulness, which is about being fully aware of what's happening in the moment. The aim is to avoid distractions such as watching TV or scrolling on your phone or working at your computer, while eating, so that your full attention is on the action of eating.

Why should I be doing it?

Practising mindful eating helps you to become more aware of your body and respond to hunger and fullness cues more appropriately. Also, by eating more slowly, and being aware of what you are eating and the sensation of chewing, helps you to enjoy your food and feel more satisfied.

Taking time out for meals, savouring not just the meal but also appreciating your environment, whether that be a park bench in nature or around a table with friends, has huge benefits to both your mental and physical wellbeing, both of which are intrinsically linked to your gut health.

Make it easy!

A household rule of no phones at mealtimes can be tricky to initiate, but will quickly become habit

Sounds a bit weird... *persuade me!*

Yes, it sounds a bit 'new age', but there are proper, concrete reasons why it's great to go slow

Okay, two things: firstly, eating mindfully enables you to focus on both the food you are eating and the people you are eating with.

If you're alone, it gives you space to evaluate your thoughts and feelings in a measured way (it's much easier to deal with emotions when we're not hungry after all). If we're in company, it enables us to focus on and enjoy the company of others much more.

Secondly, eating mindfully means eating more slowly. Eating slowly will enable you to taste the food more intensely, it'll help you make healthier choices in terms of the types and portion sizes of food, and slower eating will help improve your digestion. Less heartburn, less indigestion, more happy mealtimes. Convinced now?

BUDGET
GLUTEN FREE
BECKY EXCELL

Recipe taken from *Budget Gluten Free* by Becky Excell, photography by Hannah Hughes, published by Quadrille, £20.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Cheddar and mushroom lentil slice

Lentils come packed with fibre and are loaded with gut-healthy pre-biotic carbohydrates

Serves **4s** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **40 mins**

Vegetable oil spray
100g (1 cup) frozen chopped onion
500g (4 cups) frozen sliced mushrooms
1 tsp salt
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp mixed herbs
3 tbsp cornflour/ cornstarch
2 x 400g tins of lentils, drained
125g (1½ cups) Cheddar, grated
50g (½ cup) mozzarella, grated
Sour cream or salad, to serve

1 Spray the base of a large ovenproof pot with oil and place over a medium heat. Once hot, add the onion and fry until it's browned. Add the mushrooms and fry until liquid is released, then continue to fry until the liquid has evaporated.

2 Add the salt, pepper, mustard, mixed herbs, cornflour or potato starch and lentils, then stir briefly until everything is mixed well. Stir in the grated Cheddar and simmer until you're left with a nicely thickened, sticky mixture.

3 Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Use the back of a spoon to pat everything flat, then scatter on the mozzarella. Bake in the oven for 24-28 minutes, or until the cheese is golden brown. Allow to cool for 10-15 minutes to firm up.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've switched off screens and eaten mindfully

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Record your feelings after eating more mindfully

On the days I ate mindfully I felt...

After eating mindfully my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Pomegranate

This joyful fruit can be used to enhance the taste and texture of both sweet and savoury meals.

Why is it great?

Among many other things, pomegranates contain antioxidants, which can help reduce inflammation and improve your gut health. Pomegranate juice has three times more antioxidant activity than green tea.

Today focus on journaling

Documenting your daily wellbeing can help pinpoint stress and discover solutions

Journaling can be a transformative tool for managing stress and improving gut health. Stress often disrupts the delicate balance of the gut, contributing to bloating, discomfort and digestive issues.

By setting aside time to journal, you create a space to process emotions, identify stress triggers and shift your mindset, which can positively impact your gut-brain connection. Research shows that chronic stress can alter gut microbiota, but mindful practices such as journaling help regulate cortisol levels, supporting digestion and overall wellness.

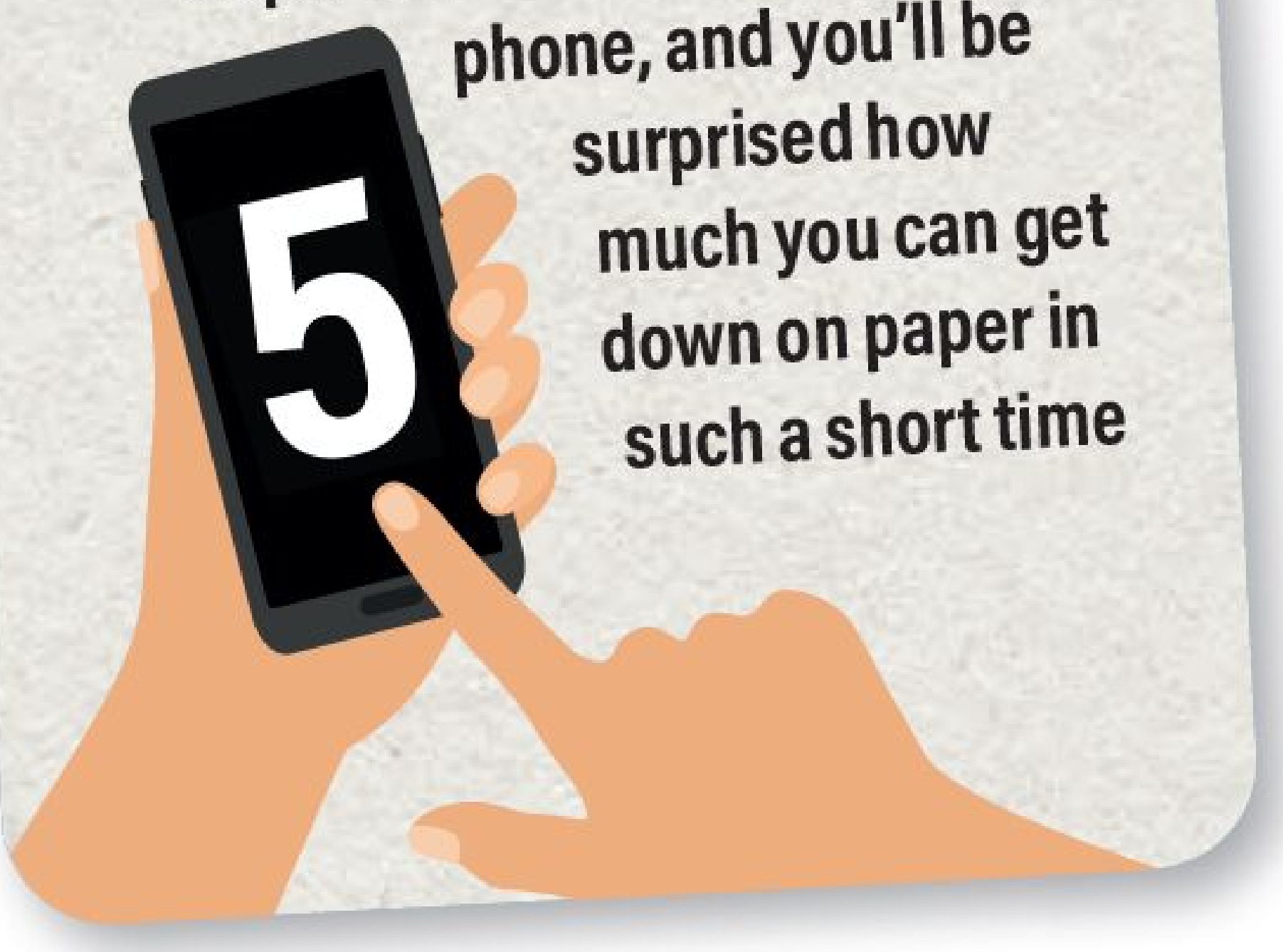
If you're navigating hormonal changes and busy lifestyles, journaling can offer clarity and self-awareness. Writing about gratitude, tracking any symptoms, or even documenting moods can highlight patterns affecting your gut health. Best of all, it's accessible and flexible – just grab a notebook, find a quiet moment, and let your thoughts flow. It's a simple and powerful step toward nurturing your mind and body.

How much should you be doing?

Start small by setting aside 5-10 minutes each day a few times a week. If you're unsure what to write, use prompts like, 'what made me feel grateful today?' or 'what's on my mind right now?' It might also be useful to track your health symptoms to gain insight over time. Aim for a routine that fits your lifestyle. Daily journaling can be transformative, but even 2–3 sessions per week can yield benefits. The key is to stay flexible – let the practice evolve to support your needs and bring you joy.

Make it easy

Pop a 5-minute timer on your phone, and you'll be surprised how much you can get down on paper in such a short time



4 creative ways to journal regularly

These simple tips and tricks are a great way to ensure journaling becomes a habit

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Morning intention setting	Before starting your day, jot down one goal, intention, or affirmation to focus your mind and set the tone.
Meal-time journaling	While waiting for your tea or coffee to brew, write a few lines about your current mood or reflections.
Evening 'brain dump'	Before bed, spend 5 minutes writing down anything on your mind to clear your thoughts and encourage better sleep.
Walking journals	Record voice notes or short reflections on your phone while on a walk, then transcribe them later to deepen your thoughts.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Beetroot & dill orzo

Beetroot are high in fibre and promote the growth of good bacteria in your gut.

Serves **2** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **25 mins**

- **1 tbsp olive oil**
- **2 beetroot, peeled, grated**
- **1 onion, peeled, finely chopped**
- **1 garlic clove, peeled, finely chopped**
- **1 celery stick, finely chopped**
- **150g (¾ cup) orzo**
- **350ml (1½ cups) vegetable stock**
- **Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- **Juice of ½ a lemon**
- **A handful of dill, roughly chopped**
- **Vegan sour cream**

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan on a medium heat, then add the beetroot, onion, garlic and celery. Stir, then cover and soften for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

2 Tip the orzo and three-quarters of the vegetable stock into the pan, stir, then bring to a boil. Cover, transfer to the oven and cook for 15 minutes.

3 After 15 minutes, the orzo should be cooked and just al-dente. Stir in the remaining stock, then taste and season as required with the salt, lemon juice and freshly ground black pepper.

4 Serve scattered with the dill and vegan sour cream.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've completed an entry in your journal

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How did keeping a journal improve your wellbeing?

On the days I journaled I felt...

Journaling helped me discover...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Beetroot

One medium-sized beetroot, or roughly 100g, will offer a huge amount of benefits for your digestive and overall health. Try grating raw into salads, or roasted with olive oil – or the recipe above!

Why is it great?

Beetroot are high in fibre, and it's also a prebiotic, encouraging the growth of healthy bacteria. Not only that, this cheery veg contains nitrates, improves blood flow to the gut and enhances your absorption of nutrients.

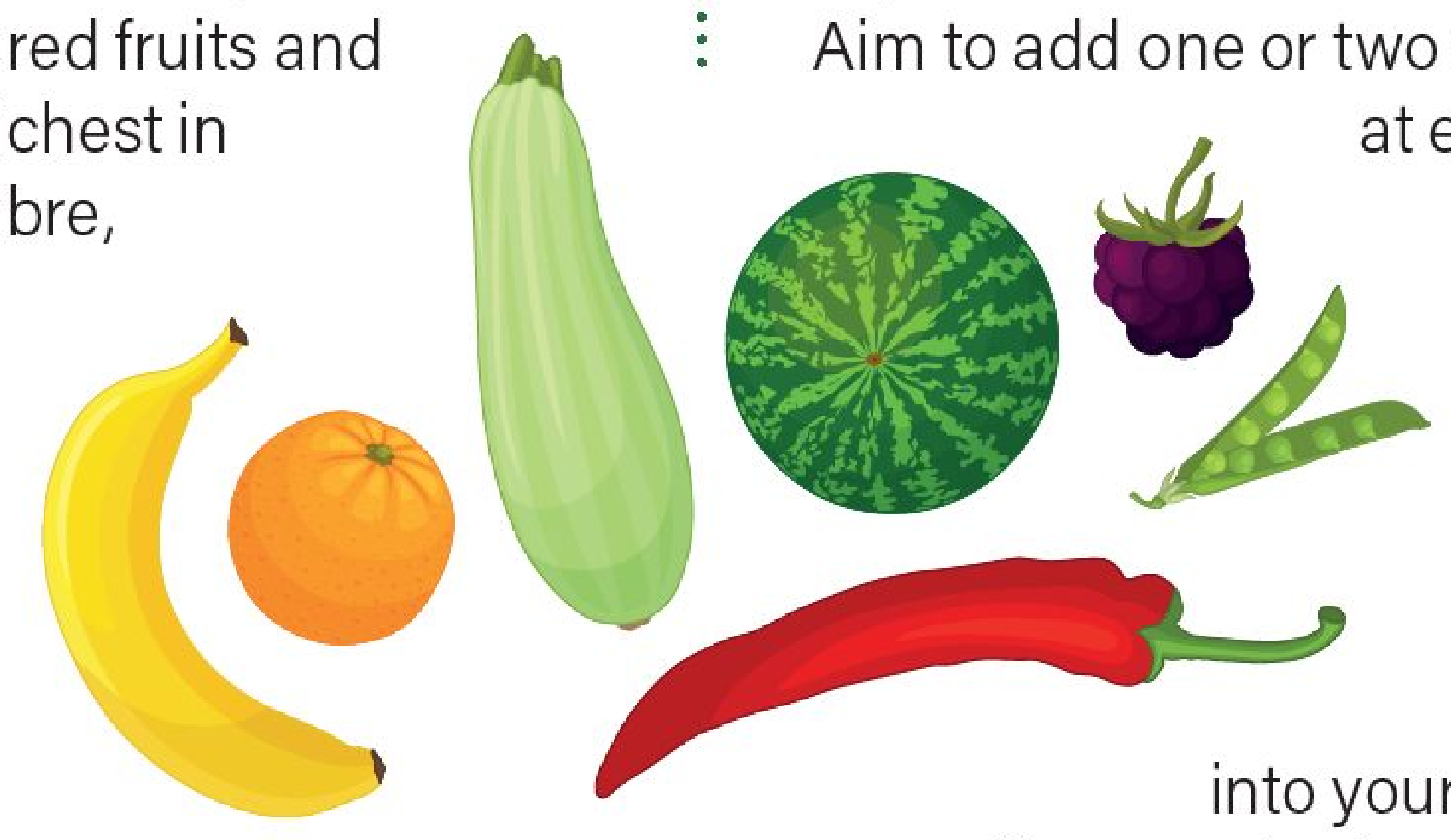
DAY 25

Today focus on adding colour

Creating a rainbow on your plate works wonders for your microbiome

Fruits and vegetables get their colours from phytochemicals, natural bioactive compounds which, in addition to giving many fruits and vegetables their eye-catching vibrancy, also promote good health. In fact, the most vibrantly coloured fruits and vegetables are the richest in vitamins, minerals, fibre, and antioxidants.

A study by Harvard University showed that by following the 'rainbow diet' (eating as many colours as possible) brain health improved, and memory loss reduced. This is because each colour fruit or vegetable represents a different phytochemical and set of nutrients that benefit our health.



Does this mean a lifetime of rabbit food?

No! Today's focus is about expanding your tastes not restricting them – this should be a completely joyful part of your 30-Day Plan, and is a fun way to explore different tastes and textures. Aim to add one or two different colours at each meal and a further one for a snack between meals. By adopting this habit and getting a variety of colour into your diet, you're rewarding your body with an array of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals that benefit your gut and overall health.

The opportunities to include fruits and vegetables into your diet are endless.

Make it easy

Stuck for ideas? Consider subscribing to a local veg box scheme to add an element of seasonal surprise

What do the *colours* mean?

Red

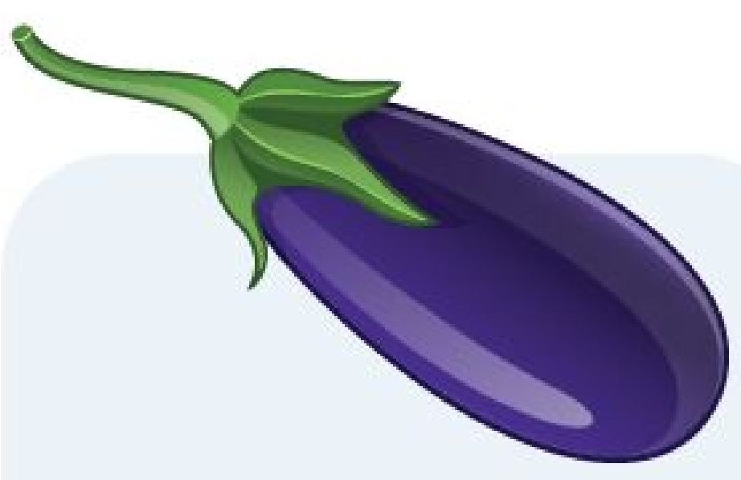
Tomatoes, watermelon, red pepper: contain lycopene, which are best known for their anti-inflammatory properties.

Orange & yellow

Melon, carrots, squash, sweet potato: contain carotenoids which reduce inflammation and reduce potential cancer risks.

Green

Broccoli, spinach, avocados: contain chlorophyl and carotenoids, both known to reduce the risk of cancers and heart disease.



Blue and purple

Blueberries, aubergine, blackberries: contain anthocyanins which may reduce the risk of heart disease.

Dark red

Beetroot: contain betalains which can help lower blood pressure. They are nutrient-rich and make for a great post work-out drink.

White & brown

Mushrooms, onions, cauliflower: contain flavanols, which are associated with a reduced risk of colon cancer.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Multivitamin gut-nourish bowl

This colourful salad can be adapted to include seasonal veg

Serves **2** | Prep **15 mins** | Cook **30 mins**

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6.

2 Peel and chop the squash into small chunks, drizzle with the extra-virgin olive oil and season with the za'atar, sea salt, pepper and chilli flakes. Roast in the oven for 30 minutes, turning halfway through the cooking time.

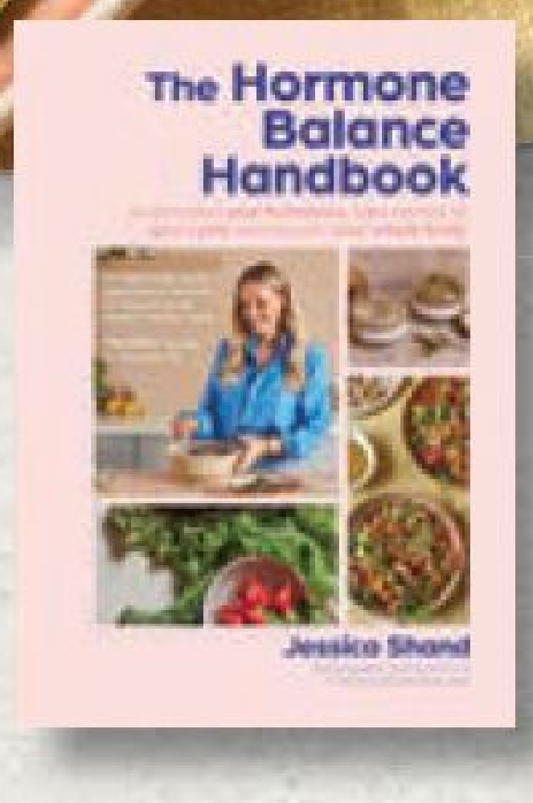
3 Add the spinach, rocket, pepper, avocado, cherry tomatoes, red onion and tuna to a bowl.

4 Combine all the dressing ingredients in a bowl.

5 When the squash is golden, add it to your salad bowl, then top with the crushed walnuts, pomegranate seeds and parsley. Drizzle with the dressing, then serve.

1 small-medium-sized butternut squash
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp za'atar
A pinch each of sea salt, black pepper and dried chilli flakes (optional)
2 handfuls of spinach
2 small handfuls of rocket
1 Romano pepper, chopped
1 avocado, chopped
A large handful of cherry tomatoes, halved
¼ of a red onion, peeled, thinly sliced
120g (4oz) tinned tuna (in olive oil)
A handful of walnuts
2 tbsp pomegranate seeds
A handful of flat-leaf parsley, chopped

For the dressing
3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp white wine vinegar
2 tsp maple syrup or raw honey
A pinch each of sea salt and freshly ground black pepper



Recipe taken from *The Hormone Balance Handbook* by Jessica Shand, published by HarperCollins, £22.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've included more colour in your diet

DAY 1 | DAY 2 | DAY 3 | DAY 4 | DAY 5 | DAY 6 | DAY 7
DAY 8 | DAY 9 | DAY 10 | DAY 11 | DAY 12 | DAY 13 | DAY 14 | DAY 15
DAY 16 | DAY 17 | DAY 18 | DAY 19 | DAY 20 | DAY 21 | DAY 22
DAY 23 | DAY 24 | DAY 25 | DAY 26 | DAY 27 | DAY 28 | DAY 29 | DAY 30

Reflection

Document how a colourful plate affected your daily wellbeing

On the days I added more colour to my plate I felt...

After adding more colour to my plate my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Strawberries

These brilliant berries are a tasty snack by themselves, and paired with yoghurt they make a great gut-busting duo. Buy them frozen in the winter to chuck into smoothies or stir into overnight oats.

Why are they great?

Let's count the ways: fibre, prebiotics, potassium, magnesium, and vitamins C and K. Cute berries; powerful punch!

DAY 26 Today focus on meditation

A happier you makes for a happier gut, and meditation takes you deep into that zone

Meditation can help with anxiety, depression, stress, and other mental health issues. It can also help you develop a more positive outlook and better understand yourself.

In addition, when regularly practised, meditation encourages an increase in your parasympathetic nervous system which, alongside the increase in neuroplasticity in the brain, helps us to manage difficult environments and experiences. All of which leads to a happier you and a happier gut.

How often should you be doing it?

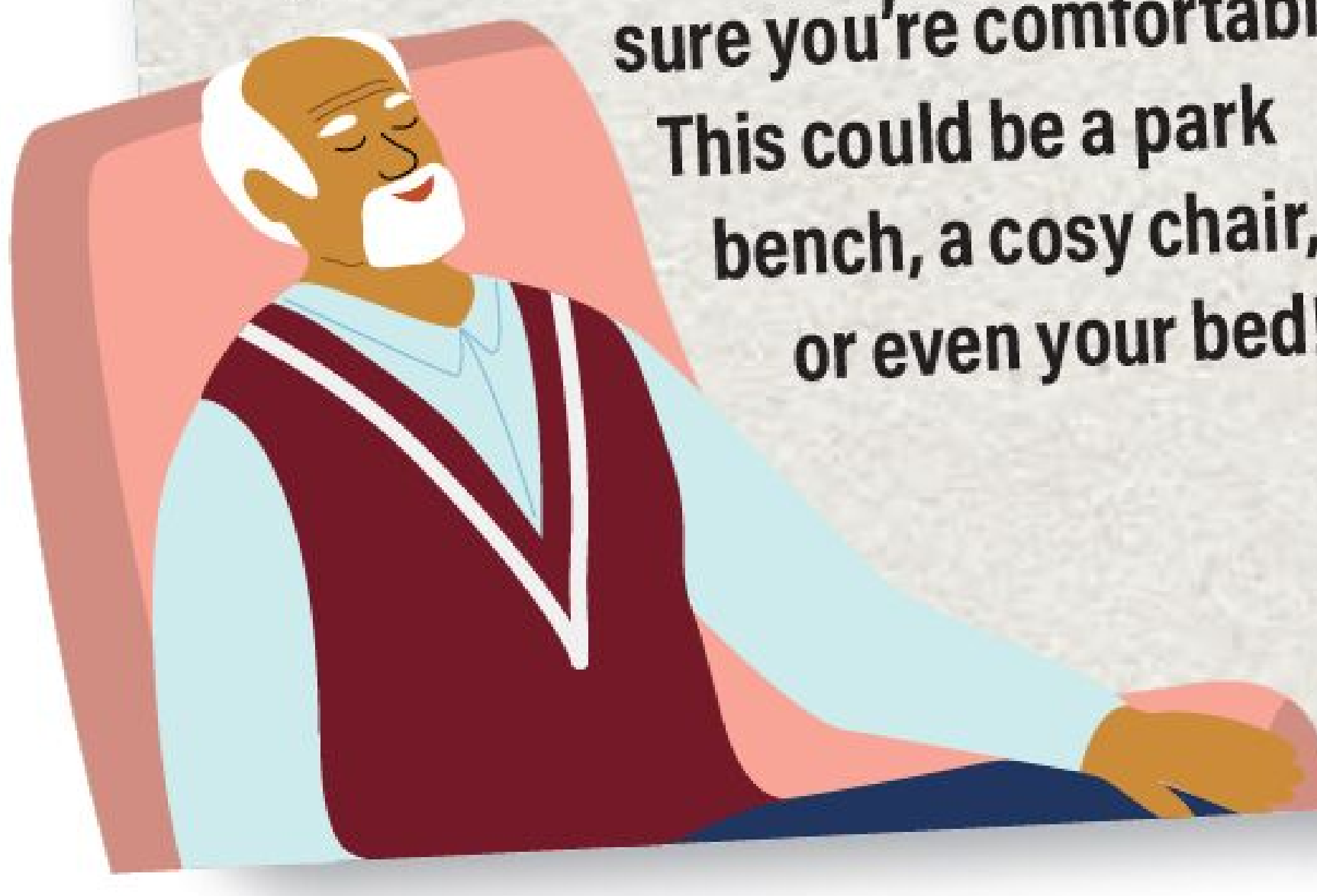
Try doing just a few minutes a day to start with and slowly build up to what feels manageable. It can be really tricky to begin with, so you may find it useful to follow a guided practice to start. There are lots of apps available to point you in the right direction. Group sessions or retreats can also be a great way to help build this into a daily practice.

Remind yourself that there is no judgement associated with meditation, and it is normal for the mind to wander. Don't berate yourself. If this happens, instead, always come back to your breath to anchor your thoughts.

Getting into a relaxed physical and mental state gives your body and mind the best possible conditions to settle itself, and this in turn can lead to a healthier gut.

Make it easy

There is no 'wrong' way to meditate – find somewhere quiet, and make sure you're comfortable. This could be a park bench, a cosy chair, or even your bed!



Try this *meditation* at home

Use simple tips and tricks to build up your meditating sessions in the comfort of your own home

Meditating is a way of regulating your breathing while focusing inwards, rather than allowing your mind to wander or race.

Ten minutes a day can be enough to regulate your stress levels and enjoy a calmer state of mind. Find a comfortable, quiet place, and make sure you're warm. Close your eyes, and breathe in slowly, while in your head saying, 'breathe in'. Then breathe out while saying 'breathe out'. Continue for as long as you can: start with five minutes, building to 20 minutes over a few days. If your mind wanders, notice it, then gently bring it back again.

Your home is your castle, so find the spot you are most comfortable in and feel the stress evaporate away with a private meditation session.

The Feel-Good Meal Plan
Lindsay Pleskot, RD

Recipe taken from *The Feel-Good Meal Plan* by Lindsay Pleskot, photography by Janis Nicolay, published by Appetite by Random House, £25.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Double chocolate tahini cookies

These cookies are packed with gut-friendly goodies to nourish your mind and your body

Makes **12** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **25 mins**

75g (½ cup) oat flour
40g (½ cup) oats
80g (½) cup dark chocolate chips
40g (¼ cup) flaxseeds
40g (¼ cup) hemp hearts
25g (¼ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
½ tsp salt
240g (1 cup) tahini
115g (⅓ cup) honey
55g (¼ cup) olive oil
1 free-range egg
Sesame seeds (optional)

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

2 Whisk together the oat flour, oats, chocolate chips, ground flax, hemp hearts, cocoa, bicarb and salt.

3 In another bowl, whisk together the tahini, honey, oil and egg until a smooth paste forms. Fold the tahini mixture into the flour mixture until combined and a dough forms.

4 Form the dough into 12 balls and place on the sheets, evenly spread. Flatten with the back of a spoon or fork. Sprinkle the tops of the cookies with sesame seeds (if using).

5 Bake for 10-12 minutes, until crispy on the outside and soft on the inside. Transfer to a wire rack cool for 7-10 minutes, then enjoy!

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've completed this habit

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	
DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11	DAY 12	DAY 13	DAY 14	DAY 15
DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21	DAY 22	
DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25	DAY 26	DAY 27	DAY 28	DAY 29	DAY 30

Reflection

Document how meditation impacts on your daily wellbeing

On the days I meditated I felt...

After meditating my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Hemp seeds

These brilliant little power boosts are delicious raw or cooked. Try toasting them in a dry frying pan, then sprinkling on your porridge, or adding them to salads and stir-fries for a tasty crunch.

Why are they great?

Hemp seeds are packed with fibre as well as those all-important omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

DAY 27

Today focus on caffeine

Caffeine has some health benefits, but in terms of our gut it's worth keeping in check

Caffeine is a mixed story when it comes to your gut. In the form of your morning coffee, it can actually have a positive impact on your gut health due to it containing dietary fibre that acts as 'food' for your all-important gut flora, the polyphenols acting as an anti-inflammatory for the gut, and promoting bowel movements.

Caffeine on its own, however, is a different story – and by this we mean energy drinks and supplements. It can lead to excessive stomach acid production leading to heart burn, and also disrupted sleep which in turn negatively affects the gut microbiome.

Furthermore, too much caffeine in the shape of coffee can increase stomach acid production that can cause unwanted gastric issues and it can exacerbate other problems such as IBS symptoms, as well of course, as the negative impact it can have on your sleep.

How much should we be drinking?

Guidelines state anywhere between two and four cups as a maximum, but this is where your food journal will come in very handy, because people react to caffeine in different ways.

It's important to note down the quantities of caffeine in your journal alongside any effects it might have produced. It's time to cut back on your caffeine if the quality of your sleep isn't as you'd wish, or you're suffering from heartburn or digestion issues as a result.

Make it easy

Start gently – replace one cup a day with a herbal tea so you still have something warm to sip

4 *creative ways* to replace caffeine in your diet

Manage your caffeine intake with some simple tips and swaps

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Check the time	Avoid caffeine late in the day – have a cut-off point of lunchtime, so your body can adjust itself before bedtime.
Up your carbs	Add complex carbs, like wholegrain bread, brown rice or quinoa to every meal for a steadier energy levels.
Read the labels	Caffeine is present in a lot of foods, including chocolate, coffee-flavoured items, protein powders and even some medicines.
Drink more water	Keep hydrated to minimise headaches and keep your energy levels up.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Italian orzo soup

This warming soup will replace your craving for a hot drink, and feed your gut with at least 13 plants!

Serves **4** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **25 mins**

- **A little oil, for frying**
- **1 small onion, finely diced**
- **2 garlic cloves, crushed**
- **2 celery stalks, sliced**
- **2 carrots, peeled, diced**
- **1 red chilli, chopped**
- **1 small red pepper, diced**
- **1 large courgette, chopped**
- **1 tsp Italian mixed herbs**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **400g (14oz) tinned tomatoes**
- **950ml (4 cups) veg stock**
- **200g (1 cup) orzo**
- **8-10 black olives, sliced**
- **A handful of chard, sliced**
- **A handful of fresh basil**
- **A handful of fresh parsley**
- **Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

1. In a large saucepan, heat the oil and add the onion, celery, garlic and carrots. Cook for 5 minutes until the onion is translucent and the carrots are slightly softened.
2. Add the pepper, chilli and courgette and cook for a further 3 minutes.
3. Add the bay leaves, dried herbs, stock, orzo and tinned tomatoes and simmer for 8-10 minutes, or until the orzo is cooked through.
4. Stir in the olives, chard and fresh herbs and cook for 1 minute or until the chard has wilted.
5. Season to taste with salt and pepper before serving.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've completed this habit

DAY 1 ○ DAY 2 ○ DAY 3 ○ DAY 4 ○ DAY 5 ○ DAY 6 ○ DAY 7 ○
DAY 8 ○ DAY 9 ○ DAY 10 ○ DAY 11 ○ DAY 12 ○ DAY 13 ○ DAY 14 ○ DAY 15 ○
DAY 16 ○ DAY 17 ○ DAY 18 ○ DAY 19 ○ DAY 20 ○ DAY 21 ○ DAY 22 ○
DAY 23 ○ DAY 24 ○ DAY 25 ○ DAY 26 ○ DAY 27 ○ DAY 28 ○ DAY 29 ○ DAY 30 ○

Reflection

Write down how kicking out caffeine has affected your mood

On the days I drank less caffeine I felt...

After drinking less caffeine my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Gooseberries

These overlooked berries are delicious stewed with a dash of agave and a pinch of mixed spice, or alternatively are fantastic in a crumble!

Why are they great?

High in fibre and low in fat, these gorgeous green berries are also chocka with antioxidants which, among many other things, will help keep your skin looking great.

DAY 28 Today focus on chocolate

One of our most popular go-to treats has some welcome gut benefits too

It bears repeating that, unless you have a known allergy or intolerance, no food is inherently 'bad' – and certainly not chocolate. While white and milk versions can be low on nutrition, and can certainly flare up gut issues because of their high fat and sugar content, dark chocolate, with its higher cocoa and lower sugar content, has plenty of benefits you might not realise.

Dark chocolate contains polyphenols: these are plant compounds that have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which can work wonders for your gut. Studies have shown that moderate consumption can actually help lower cholesterol and blood pressure.

How much should I be eating?

Three or four squares of good-quality dark chocolate a day – just as they are, or melted into hot milk – is a fantastic addition to your gut-friendly diet. And the benefits to including chocolate go way beyond nurturing your microbiome. Chocolate contains tryptophan, which helps the brain produce serotonin, a chemical that can improve your mood. Plus, it can prevent that deprivation mentality enabling you to feel more in control and to be more mindful of your diet as a whole.

Of course, dark chocolate is still something that should be eaten in moderation, as with all foods containing added sugar, but at least this is one Daily Focus that we know will be easier to stick to!

Make it easy

Chocolate for breakfast? Why not! Mix a teaspoon of cocoa nibs with berries and seeds for a nutritious start to the day

4 ways to eat dark chocolate

As if we needed an excuse! Try out these tips to add dark chocolate to your diet

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Higher the better!	Aim for chocolate that has a higher cocoa content for optimal antioxidant benefits – 70% or higher.
Savour the taste	Eat your chocolate mindfully – let it melt slowly on your tongue rather than chewing, and you'll enjoy the taste and texture much more (and it will last longer).
Bedtime bliss	Melt grated dark chocolate into milk to make a hot chocolate and boost your protein intake at the same time.
Breakfast top ups	Combine cocoa nibs with other gut health greats, such as yoghurt or nuts, and combine with granola.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Salted chocolate peanut tart

Dark chocolate combined with salted peanuts is a delicious way to boost your gut health

Serves **10** | Prep **35 mins** | Cook **35 mins**

75g (⅓ cup) unsalted peanuts
75ml (⅓ cup) water
300g (2⅓ cups) plain flour
90ml (⅓ cup) olive oil
60ml (¼ cup) water
a pinch of salt
300g (10½oz) vegan dark chocolate, roughly chopped
100ml (½ cup) boiling water
25g (¼ cup) salted peanuts, roughly chopped

1 Start by putting the peanuts into a container with the water, then leave them to soak while you get on with the pastry.

2 Blitz the flour and olive oil in a food processor until it looks like breadcrumbs, then add the water and salt and pulse briefly until the mixture comes together as a dough. Turn out onto a surface, bring it together, then wrap in clingfilm and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

3 Roll out the pastry until 2-3mm thick, then use it to line a 20cm (8in) tart tin. Trim the overhanging pastry from the sides, prick the base with a fork, then refrigerate for a further 30 minutes.

4 Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Line the pastry case with crumpled baking paper, then fill with baking beans or rice. Transfer to the oven and bake for 15 minutes, after which the sides should feel sandy to the touch. Remove the baking beans, then bake for a further 15 minutes until the tart case is a pale golden brown. Leave the tart case to cool down for 15 minutes.

5 Blitz the peanuts and the water in a high-speed blender until you have a thick, smooth, creamy consistency – there shouldn't be any bits of peanut.

6 Put the chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of boiling water (don't let the water touch the base of the bowl). Stir until melted, then add the peanut cream and boiling water and whisk until the mixture comes together glossily.

7 Spread the chocolate mixture into the tart tin and scatter over the salted peanuts. Leave to set in the fridge for at least 1 hour before serving.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've eaten dark chocolate mindfully

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Write down how eating dark chocolate has affected your mood

On the days I ate dark chocolate I felt...

After eating dark chocolate my energy levels were...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Millet

Cooked in the same way as rice, millet offers a tasty gut health upgrade for stews, curries and salads.

Why is it great?

Millet is full of tannins, phytates, and phenols that help protect your cells against damage and potential diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol. The insoluble fibre in millet acts as a prebiotic, which feeds that good bacteria in your gut.

DAY 29

Today focus on **balance**

Ditch the scales: it's time to find new goals that aren't based on weightloss

Today's focus might seem like the easiest one of all, but for many of us it will be the hardest: it's time to shift our mindset away from weightloss as a primary goal.

For many of us undertaking this gut health journey, one of the ambitions might well be to lose weight. And by ticking off these habits each day, there's a good chance this might happen – and that of course is absolutely fine (and good for you!). But it's important to focus on health and wellbeing over and above a specific number on the scales.

There is no denying that the western world has a bias towards a smaller body. However, what this doesn't consider is the fact that we all come from different genetic backgrounds. To a degree, our blueprint of body size is already determined at birth, and it can actually be more harmful to constrain and constrict your body into a size that is not appropriate for you.

Reframing our goals

In terms of our gut health, we know by now that external stress can have a huge detrimental effect on our digestion and wellbeing – there's that link between mind and gut again. Focusing on what we weigh, comparing ourselves with others, and generally being hard on ourselves and our bodies is unhealthy and depressing, and can lead to all manner of disordered thinking. This will ultimately affect our mental health as well as our physical health.

So today, instead of focusing on body size and numbers on the scales, it's time to focus on the good things you've been doing over the past month to increase your health and wellbeing, and instead measure yourselves against a different set of metrics.

Make it easy

Journal instead of weighing: really think about how you feel today and use that as your measurement of success

Metrics to use instead of scales

There are so many more ways to meaure our success that offer a far more useful snapshot of our health

1 Use the mirror, but not the full-length one. As these habits become routine one thing you'll notice is clearer, brighter skin: use this as your daily reminder to keep at it!

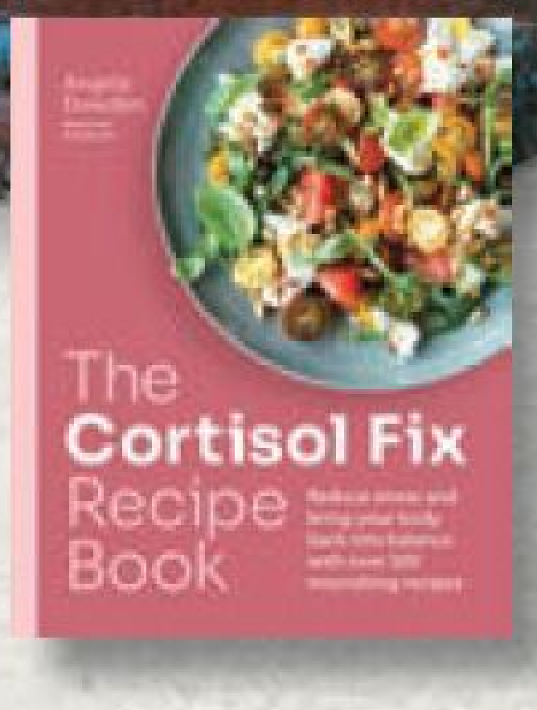
2 If you feel happy to do so, use your GP's measurements of blood pressure and cholesterol as more significant numbers to celebrate when they move in the right direction.

3 Congratulate yourself as you notice your sleep improving with all the small changes you've implemented over the course of the *30 Days to Better Gut Health*. It's worth celebrating!

4 Celebrate when you do things that you enjoy, whether that's spending time with friends and family, or with hobbies that spark joy. And consider new passtimes that do this too.

5 Consider how you feel as one of the most important measurements: with additional movement, plants and mindfulness, do you feel happier and healthier?

6 Reducing stress is one of the biggest wins for our gut and overall health; give yourself a gold star when you take proactive action to reduce those stressful moments.



The Cortisol Fix Recipe Book by Angela Dowden
Published by Hamlyn (£18.99).
Photography: William Shaw

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Beans & peppers with harissa

Whole foods offer plenty of fibre, delivering a slow and healthy energy release into the body

Serves **4-6** | Prep **10 mins** | Cook **1½ hours**

- **225g (1½ cups) dried butter beans, soaked in water overnight**
- **225g (1½ cups) dried kidney beans, soaked in water overnight**
- **2 tbsp olive oil**
- **A knob of butter**
- **2 onions, peeled, finely chopped**
- **4-6 garlic cloves, peeled, smashed**
- **2 tsp sugar**
- **2 tsp cumin seeds**
- **2 red, orange or yellow peppers, deseeded, diced**
- **1–2 tsp harissa paste**
- **2 x 400g (14oz) tins of chopped tomatoes**
- **A small bunch of mint, finely chopped**
- **Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

1. Drain and rinse both beans. Place in a saucepan filled with water, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 40 minutes until tender. Drain and refresh under cold water, then remove any loose skins.
2. Heat the oil and butter in a large saucepan, stir in the onions, garlic and sugar, then cook for 2-3 minutes to soften. Add the cumin and peppers and cook for 1-2 minutes, then add the beans and stir to coat.
3. Stir in the harissa and tomatoes and cook for 30 minutes. Season to taste, then stir in half the mint and garnish with the remaining mint. Serve with chunks of bread and a dollop of creamy yoghurt, if desired.

Habit tracker

Tick the days you've avoided the scales

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7
DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15
DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22
DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

Record how reframing your measurements made you feel

Instead of weighing myself, I measured my health by...

After not weighing myself for a week, I felt...

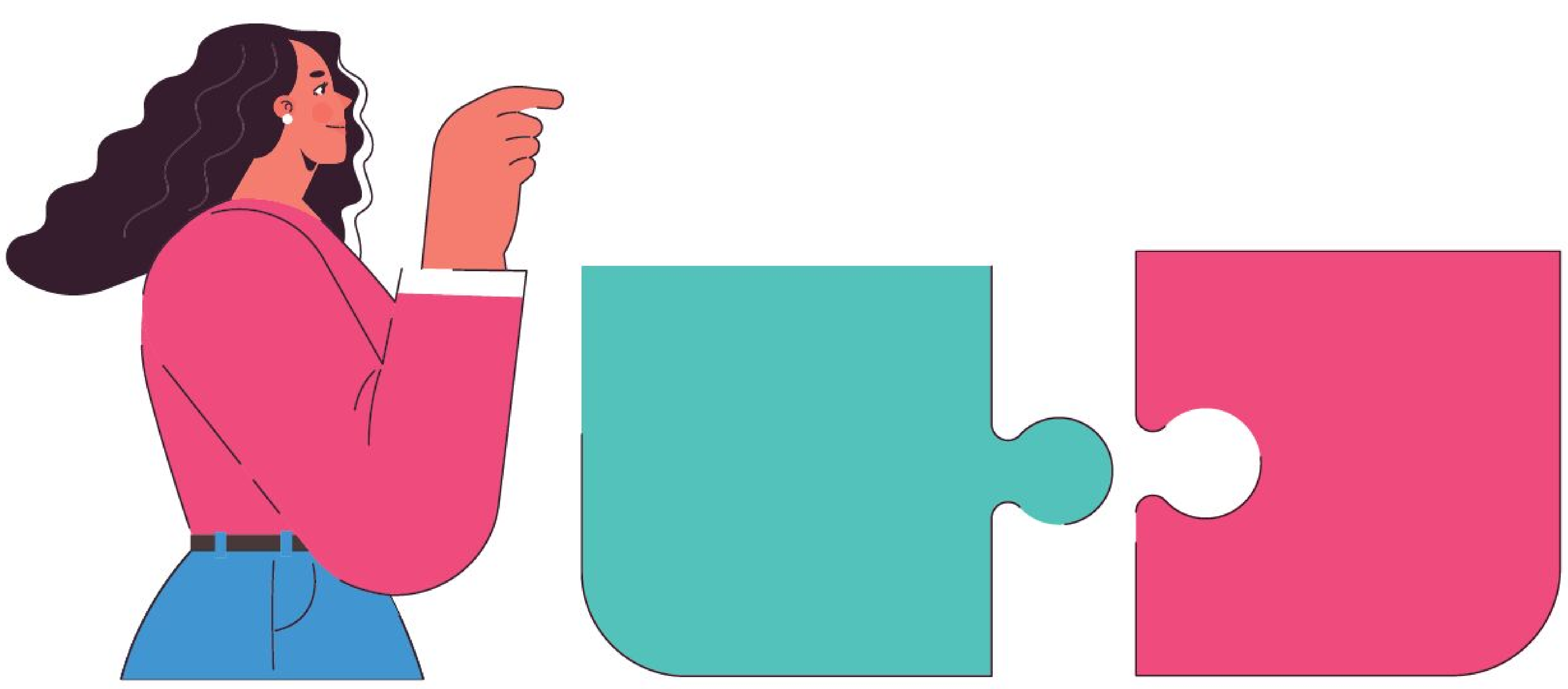
PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Butter beans

These beautiful legumes can be eaten cold in salads or simmered slowly with garlic and herbs for a comforting stew. They also add plenty of bulk to a meal so you can pad out dishes to make the food go further.

Why are they great?

Butter beans, or lima beans, are rich in fibre, antioxidants, nutrients and can alleviate the symptoms of IBS. They are a superfood for your gut health!



DAY 30

Today focus on habit-stacking

By adding habits to existing ones, you'll have a better chance of making them stick

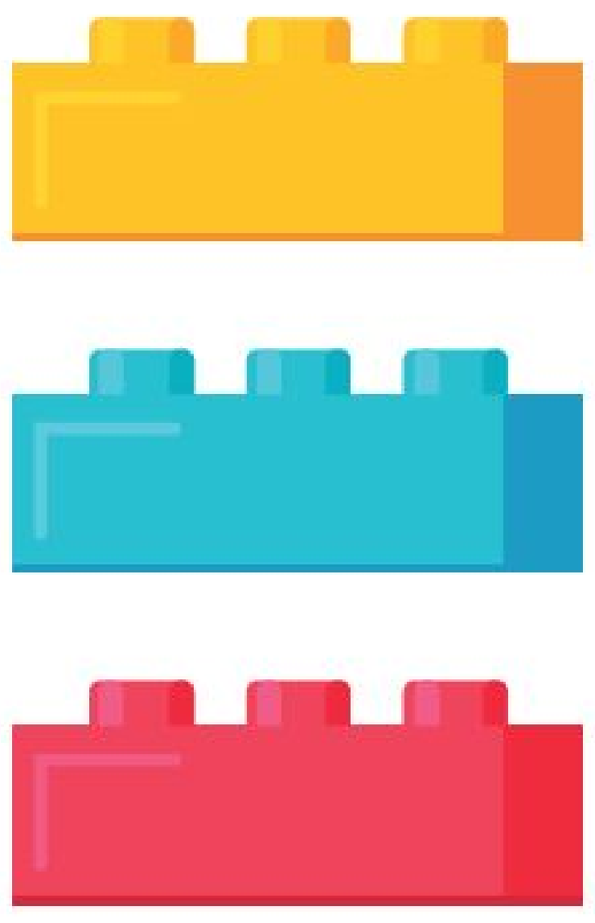
Habit-stacking is a powerful technique, and it's one that will help ensure the most important daily changes we've introduced here become habits that you stick to for life. Habit-stacking is the theory of linking new habits to existing ones: this helps you create routines that make it much easier to stay consistent.

For example, if you already drink a cup of tea each morning, you can pair this habit with switching your dairy milk to oat milk. Or you could add a spoonful of yoghurt to your granola in the time it takes your tea to brew. This method simplifies the process of adopting new behaviours by using familiar triggers and reducing the mental effort required to build a new routine.

Habit-stacking tricks your brain into incorporating new habits with very little effort, such as taking your water bottle along with you for a walk. It's an effective way to build a healthy gut-friendly lifestyle without feeling overwhelmed by drastic changes.

How much you should be doing?

Start small! To consistently habit-stack and turn habits into lasting routines, focus on one or two changes at a time until it feels like you've always done them. Linking a new habit to a well-established one helps integrate it naturally into your day.



Avoid overloading yourself with too many new habits at once. Instead, focus on mastering one stack before adding another. Gradually building your routine in this way ensures the habits feel manageable, reducing the risk of overwhelm and making it easier to stay consistent over time.

Make it easy

Place a small sticky label on your laptop to remind yourself to drink more water throughout the day; add another one in front of the TV to nudge yourself to do your journaling

drink
water

4 *creative ways* to habit-stack

Use simple cues to make sure your 30 Day changes stick for life

TRY THIS!	THE DETAILS
Morning hydration	Stack drinking a glass of water in the morning with taking a probiotic supplement. Keep both near your coffee maker.
Meal prep	While preparing dinner, chop extra vegetables for the next day's lunch.
Screen-free evenings	Turn off your TV 10 minutes' earlier than usual, and take that time to relax with a calming tea and a small bowl of yoghurt or kimchi, creating a relaxation ritual.
Daily walk	Pair a post-meal walk with mindful deep breathing to support digestion and reduce stress.

RECIPE OF THE DAY

Kefir & date porridge loaf

High in nutrients and probiotics, kefir is hugely beneficial for digestion and gut health

By Yeo Valley (www.yeovalley.co.uk)

Serves **8** | Prep **20 mins** | Cook **30-45 mins**

- **250g (2¾ cups) oats**
- **500ml Yeo Valley Organic Natural Drinking Kefir**
- **3 free-range eggs, whisked**
- **1 tsp bicarbonate of soda**
- **150g (1½ cups) ground almonds**
- **½ tsp salt**
- **1 tbsp ground cinnamon**
- **4 tbsp maple syrup**
- **150g (¾ cup) pitted dates, chopped**
- **To serve: Jam & Yeo Valley Organic Unsalted Butter**

1. Line a 1.5 litre (3lb) loaf tin with parchment paper. Preheat the oven to 170°C/Gas Mark 3.
2. Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and stir to combine.
3. Add the mixture to the loaf tin and bake in the oven for 30-45 minutes. A skewer inserted into the centre of the loaf should come out clean when it's ready. If the loaf is still quite wet, cover the tin with foil and continue to cook until the skewer comes out with no bits stuck to it.
4. Allow to cool, remove from the loaf tin, then slice.
5. You can toast this loaf or heat it up in the oven. It's best served with butter and jam.

30 Day Habit Tracker

Tick the days you've stacked your habits

DAY 1 DAY 2 DAY 3 DAY 4 DAY 5 DAY 6 DAY 7

DAY 8 DAY 9 DAY 10 DAY 11 DAY 12 DAY 13 DAY 14 DAY 15

DAY 16 DAY 17 DAY 18 DAY 19 DAY 20 DAY 21 DAY 22

DAY 23 DAY 24 DAY 25 DAY 26 DAY 27 DAY 28 DAY 29 DAY 30

Reflection

How have these little changes affected your daily wellbeing?

On the days I completed my habits I felt...

The new changes that have become habits are...

PLANT FOOD OF THE DAY

Pumpkin seeds

Eating about 1-2 tablespoons (10-20g) of pumpkin seeds daily can be beneficial for gut health. Add them to salads, smoothies, porridge or yoghurt for a tasty, nutrient-dense, crunchy hit.

Why are they great?

Pumpkin seeds are rich in dietary fibre, magnesium and healthy fats, all of which support digestive health. Their fibre content promotes regular bowel movements and nourishes beneficial gut bacteria, while magnesium aids in smooth muscle function, including the digestive tract.

Your 30 DAYS CALENDAR

DAY 1

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Move for 30 minutes ☐
Eat whole fruit ☐
Spend time in nature ☐
Reduce caffeine ☐

DAY 2

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Focus on fibre ☐
Go alcohol-free ☐
Focus on stress management ☐

DAY 3

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Move for 30 minutes ☐
Eat whole fruit ☐
Spend time in nature ☐
Reduce caffeine ☐

DAY 4

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Focus on fibre ☐
Go alcohol-free ☐
Focus on stress management ☐

DAY 5

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Move for 30 minutes ☐
Eat whole fruit ☐
Spend time in nature ☐
Reduce caffeine ☐

DAY 6

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Focus on fibre ☐
Go alcohol-free ☐
Focus on stress management ☐

DAY 7

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include pulses ☐
Try a new plant ☐
Dark chocolate for pudding ☐

DAY 8

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include yoghurt ☐
Stir in some spices ☐
Find time to meditate ☐

DAY 9

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Go meat-free ☐
Focus on omega-3s ☐
Add colour to your plate ☐

DAY 10

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try chickpeas ☐
Go dairy-free ☐
Add in one good sleep hygiene practice ☐

DAY 11

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try fermented food ☐
Check food labels ☐
Keep sweeteners in check ☐
Note weekly reflections in your journal ☐

DAY 12

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include pulses ☐
Try a new plant ☐
Dark chocolate for pudding ☐

DAY 13

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include yoghurt ☐
Stir in some spices ☐
Find time to meditate ☐

DAY 14

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Go meat-free ☐
Focus on omega-3s ☐
Add colour to your plate ☐

DAY 15

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try chickpeas ☐
Go dairy-free ☐
Add in one good sleep hygiene practice ☐

This is a guide to how you could spread each of the areas to focus on across 30 days – you can arrange them how they fit best into your life.

Tick off the items you're focusing on each day – but you don't need to tick everything, all the time!

Every tick you make on this calendar is a positive step forward for your overall wellbeing, and even maintaining just one of these areas of focus will make a huge impact on your health.

Even if you do go a whole day, or even longer, without managing to put a tick in the box, don't worry about it. This isn't about making radical changes to your way of life, it's just a guide for you to take positive steps towards a healthier you. Baby steps are just fine!

Remember though, every time you do make a tick, the easier it will be to make that habit last for life.

See where you are in 30 days!

DAY 16

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try fermented food ☐
Check food labels ☐
Keep sweeteners in check ☐
Note weekly reflections in your journal ☐

DAY 17

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include pulses ☐
Try a new plant ☐
Dark chocolate for pudding ☐

DAY 18

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include yoghurt ☐
Stir in some spices ☐
Find time to meditate ☐

DAY 19

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Go meat-free ☐
Focus on omega-3s ☐
Add colour to your plate ☐

DAY 20

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try chickpeas ☐
Go dairy-free ☐
Add in one good sleep hygiene practice ☐

DAY 21

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try fermented food ☐
Check food labels ☐
Keep sweeteners in check ☐
Note weekly reflections in your journal ☐

DAY 22

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include pulses ☐
Try a new plant ☐
Dark chocolate for pudding ☐

DAY 23

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include yoghurt ☐
Stir in some spices ☐
Find time to meditate ☐

DAY 24

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Go meat-free ☐
Focus on omega-3s ☐
Add colour to your plate ☐

DAY 25

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try chickpeas ☐
Go dairy-free ☐
Add in one good sleep hygiene practice ☐

DAY 26

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try fermented food ☐
Check food labels ☐
Keep sweeteners in check ☐
Note weekly reflections in your journal ☐

DAY 27

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include pulses ☐
Try a new plant ☐
Dark chocolate for pudding ☐

DAY 28

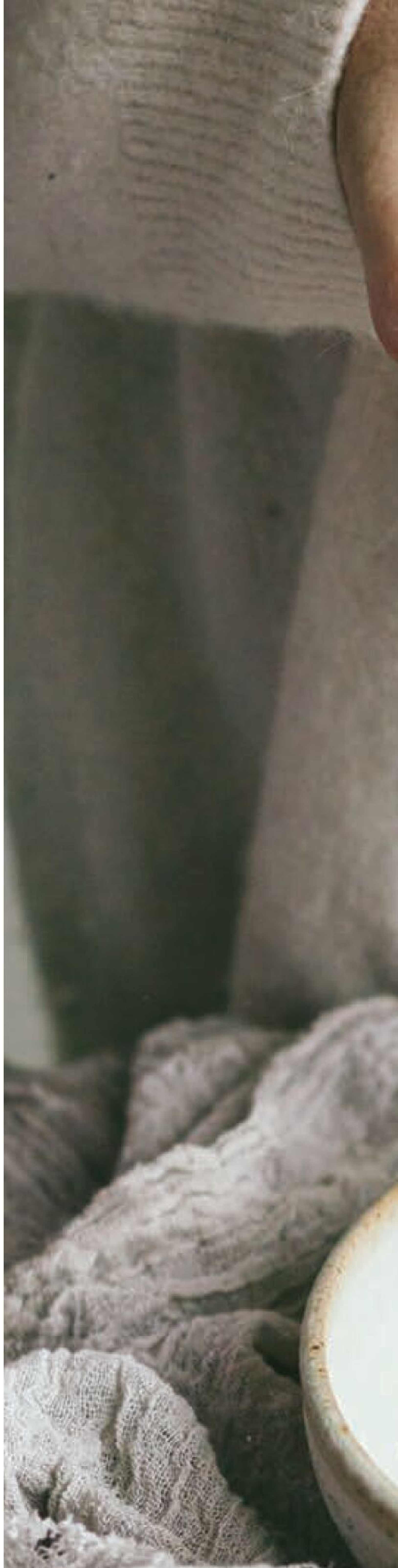
Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Include yoghurt ☐
Stir in some spices ☐
Find time to meditate ☐

DAY 29

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Go meat-free ☐
Focus on omega-3s ☐
Add colour to your plate ☐

DAY 30

Drink 2 litres of water ☐
Write your food diary ☐
Check your poo ☐
Eat mindfully ☐
Try chickpeas ☐
Go dairy-free ☐
Add in one good sleep hygiene practice ☐



We are what we eat

Say hello to your gut's new best friends: Bio&Me's range of Granolas and Kefirs

NO ADDED SUGAR
Bio&Me
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT
GRANOLA
SUPER SEEDY & NUTTY
HIGH IN FIBRE • PLANT-BASED DIVERSITY • VEGAN FRIENDLY
NO ADDED SUGAR
Bio&Me
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT
GLUTEN FREE
GRANOLA
CASHEW & ALMOND
HIGH IN FIBRE • PLANT-BASED DIVERSITY • VEGAN FRIENDLY

Created by The Gut Health Doctor
NO ADDED SUGAR
Bio&Me
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT
GRANOLA
LOW SUGAR, NATURALLY
Delicious oats, toasted almonds & a sprinkle of chia seeds
PREBIOTIC HIGH IN FIBRE
Created by The Gut Health Doctor
NO ADDED SUGAR
Bio&Me
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT
9g PROTEIN per serving
GRANOLA
COCOA & HAZELNUT
Bio&Me
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT
Kefir
LIVE YOGHURT
VANILLA
18 UNIQUE LIVE CULTURES
Bio&Me
Kefir
DRINK
NATURAL
+100 billion gut friendly cultures

Did you know that 70% of our immune system lives in our gut? Keeping the community of gut bacteria living inside you (your gut microbiota) healthy and happy has been linked with a lower risk of conditions like certain cancers, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. It also contributes to protecting your mental health and optimising your metabolism, energy, immunity, hormones, and much more.

So, this year, why not embrace a healthier, happier you - without restrictions! Bio&Me, the gut-loving range founded by world-renowned gut health specialist, The Gut Health Doctor, Dr Megan Rossi, BSc, PhD RD, is all about celebrating what you can include in your diet, not what you should leave out. Yes, increasing the amount and diversity of plant based fibre in your diet is one of the best ways to deliver gut health benefits… it's your gut microbes' favourite food after all!

Fuel for your gut

Take a bowl of the good stuff: Bio&Me's Gut-Loving Granola, brimming with up to 15 diverse plant-based ingredients. High in fibre, no added sugar, no nasties, just wholesome 'Good for Your Gut' goodness that's backed by science (and EFSA[1] approved!). Choose from seven delicious flavours, including Super Seedy & Nutty and Low Sugar, Naturally, plus there's two gluten-free options: Cashew & Almond and Berry Burst.

Kefir for the win!

For the ultimate gut healthy breakfast or snack, pair your granola with a Bio&Me 'Good for Your Gut' Kefir Yoghurt (choose from Original, Vanilla and Mango), or one of their new Kefir Drinks (available in Natural and Vanilla). Packed with over 100 billion live cultures and 18 strains, including Dr Megan's personal favourites - BB-12 and LGG – they contain no added sugars, artificial sweeteners, thickeners or emulsifiers. Plus, they're a great source of calcium, B12, B2, and phosphorus.

---

[1] European Food Safety Authority

Visit bioandme.co.uk to find out more and bag 15% off your order with the code **30DayGut**

The Bio&Me range is stocked in supermarkets nationwide including Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose.

Join the Bio&Me community on Instagram **@bioandmeuk**

DR MEGAN'S TOP TIPS

Dr Megan Rossi says: "Don't set yourself up for failure with unrealistic goals. The most important point to focus on is eating more deliciously diverse foods. Because if your gut biome is healthier and happier, you'll hopefully feel healthier and happier - inside and out."

1 The more the merrier! Aim for 30 different plant-based foods every week from the 'Super Six': Vegetables, Fruit, Legumes, Nuts, Seeds and Wholegrains.

2 Adopt an INclusion not EXclusion mantra. You don't need to go on a 'detox diet' to enjoy good gut health. Food is nourishing and to be enjoyed – even chocolate!

3 Shop the rainbow. Go for a mixed stir-fry vegetable pack instead of only adding broccoli or buy more than one colour of pepper.

4 Boosting your daily fibre intake doesn't have to be expensive. Simply add a can of mixed beans to your pasta sauce or replace half the meat in a bolognese with cooked lentils.

5 Give fermented foods a go. From kefir drinks and yoghurts to spicy Korean kimchi, fermented foods offer a host of potential benefits, adding to the balance of 'friendly' bacteria in your gut.

Here to help your health journey...

AirFryer Cookbook
Healthy New Year!
Vegan Food & Living
ONE POTS
Anti-inflammatory Cookbook
Heal your body
Pinch of Nom
Gluten-Free Cookbook
Make anything gluten-free
AirFryer Cookbook
Healthy 30-minute meals
How to LIVE LONGER and better
Vegetarian AirFryer
Quick & easy meat-free meals
Women's Running
ACE IN 8 WEEKS

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The science behind the habits

Now we've discovered the 30 ideas we're going to try to stack into our lives, let's find out more about the foods we're trying to include, and the benefits they'll give us. You might be surprised by page 110...

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Probiotics, Prebiotics & Postbiotics

Words: Laura Tilt

If you're interested in gut health, you've probably heard of probiotics and prebiotics. But there's also a newcomer: postbiotics. So, what exactly are these 'biotics,' and how can they support your health? Let's break down the differences and find out how we can include them in our diet

PROBIOTICS

What are they?

Probiotics are live microbes – mostly bacteria and some yeasts – that can benefit your health when eaten in large enough amounts. Live microbes are found in both foods (like yoghurt and kefir) and dietary supplements, but only types with scientifically proven benefits are classified as 'probiotic.'

What are the benefits?

It's a misconception that probiotics settle in your gut permanently. In reality, they're just visitors that can change the gut environment while they're moving through it. This includes interacting with your immune system, preventing harmful microbes from growing and multiplying, and producing helpful compounds that keep your gut lining healthy.

Beyond altering the gut environment, research has shown that certain probiotics offer various health benefits, such as preventing antibiotic-associated diarrhoea in children and adults, reducing digestive discomforts like constipation, improving symptoms in people with IBS, helping people with ulcerative colitis stay well for longer, and reducing inflammation, fatigue, and GI symptoms in athletes.

Although most probiotics have the same core benefits in terms of creating a healthy gut environment, specific health benefits (like easing constipation) are 'strain specific.' So, if you're taking a probiotic for a particular issue, it's important to pick a strain studied in humans and shown to benefit that problem. Make sure you check the pack, and for more help, you can ask a gut health dietitian.

How to include them?

Because there are no approved health claims for probiotics in the UK, foods and supplements can't use the word 'probiotic' on their labels. Instead you might see products use words like 'live cultures,' 'bio,' or similar.

Foods containing live microbes include live yoghurt, milk kefir, and fermented vegetables like sauerkraut and kimchi. While these foods haven't been studied as 'probiotics,' they are still worth adding to your diet.

If you're new to fermented foods, start small and build up. Try live yoghurt or kefir in a post-run smoothie, pour over granola instead of milk, or try with a bowl of fruit for a snack. Vegetable krauts are great in salads or sandwiches, and kimchi is delicious stirred into rice and topped with a fried egg.

When it comes to supplements, choose trusted brands with strains backed by research (see tips below), and take them daily for at least four weeks to see if they work for you.

NAME GAME

Probiotics are identified by their genus, species and strain. In the probiotic 'Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG' – Lactobacillus is the genus, rhamnosus the species and GG the strain. This detail matters, as probiotic benefits are specific to each strain.

Top tips to...
CHOOSING AND USING A PROBIOTIC SUPPLEMENT

Choose the right strain for your needs Probiotics come in many strains, each with different potential benefits. Look for strains that have been specifically tested for the issue you want to address – whether it's IBS, bloating, or constipation.

Give it time Take the probiotic daily for at least four weeks to see if you notice any improvement. If there's no change in symptoms by then, it may be time to try a different strain or combination of strains.
For best results, use the dose shown to be effective in studies. In most studies finding a health benefit, probiotics are taken daily.

Choose a trusted brand Some products may not contain enough live bacteria or have any scientific evidence behind them. Look for brands backed by scientific trials in humans and choose companies with a reputation for quality.

Check for IBS-friendly options If you have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), avoid probiotic supplements with prebiotic ingredients like chicory, inulin, or fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS), as these can aggravate bloating in IBS-sensitive tummies.

PREBIOTICS

What are they?

Put simply, prebiotics are 'food for microbes.' Think of them as nutrients that feed the good microbes already living in your gut, helping them thrive. Many prebiotics are types of fibre, but they also include polyphenols – compounds found in plant foods that are usually known for their antioxidant effects. Foods rich in prebiotics include garlic, onions, artichokes, lentils, beans and oats. You can also take prebiotics in supplement form, most of which are made from chicory root, which is high in a prebiotic called inulin.

What are the benefits?

When consumed in large enough amounts, prebiotics can increase the number of beneficial microbes in your gut. When your microbes consume prebiotics, they churn out beneficial compounds that can help create a healthy gut environment. Prebiotics have also been shown to improve calcium absorption, which suggests they may play a role in supporting bone health.

How to include them

At the moment there's no recommended daily amount of prebiotics to aim for. Most studies linking prebiotics with health benefits have found that 3-5 grams a day is an effective dose, but it's difficult to be precise unless you're taking a supplement. A high-fibre diet will help you get prebiotic fibres, and you can aim to include some prebiotic-rich foods each day. For example, try muesli or oats for breakfast, a red lentil dahl for lunch, and a leek risotto for dinner. Snacks like dried fruit and nuts are also great choices.

If you want a more consistent dose, consider a supplement, or look for prebiotics added to foods like breakfast cereals or yoghurt. They will be named on the label as chicory, inulin, or the Scrabble-friendly fructooligosaccharides (FOS).

One word of warning, when you increase prebiotics or fibre in your diet, go slow! More fibre/prebiotics means more food for your gut bacteria, which can result in extra gas. This is a normal (and healthy) side effect, but starting with small amounts gives your gut time to adjust. If you have IBS, be aware that prebiotics can trigger bloating. Check with an IBS-specialist dietitian about IBS-friendly prebiotic foods, or consider a supplement made from GOS (galacto-oligosaccharides), which is less likely to be a problem.

> "Try muesli or oats for breakfast, a red lentil dhal for lunch, and a leek risotto for dinner"

POSTBIOTICS

What are they?

If probiotics are live microbes, then postbiotics are what's left behind – they're like the 'afterlife' of microbes! Previously dubbed ghostbiotics, they include inactive or dead microbes (either whole or in fragments) that can still positively impact health. Postbiotics can also include beneficial compounds that these microbes produced while alive.

It's thought that foods naturally contain postbiotics, like certain fermented foods that have been heat-treated to extend shelf life (and the microbes inactivated). There is also potential for postbiotics to be added to foods or taken as supplements.

What are the benefits?

Postbiotics are a relatively new concept, but scientists are excited about their potential to offer similar benefits to probiotics – with the added bonus that they don't need to be alive to work. This is a major advantage, as the acidic environment of the stomach often makes it difficult for probiotics to survive. Some studies suggest postbiotics may help prevent diarrhoea and reduce the risk of the common cold, but research is still limited. It's definitely a 'watch this space' area.

How can I include them?

Right now, the best way to get postbiotics is through your diet. Fermented foods like sourdough and pasteurised sauerkraut may be sources of postbiotics, as they're made with live microbes that are inactivated by the time they reach your plate. Eating plenty of fibre-rich foods also helps, as it supports your resident gut microbes, which then produce healthy compounds that fit the postbiotic definition.

> "Postbiotics are a relatively new concept, but they potentially offer similar benefits to probiotics – with the bonus that they don't need to be alive to work"

The FODMAP diet

Words: Charlie Watson

To ease certain digestive symptoms, experts often recommend eliminating 'high FODMAP foods' for a period of time; but what are FODMAP foods, and why do they cause symptoms in the first place?

The term FODMAP is an acronym that stands for Fermentable Oligosaccharides, Disaccharides, Monosaccharides, and Polyols; a collective group of fermentable carbohydrates found in various foods.

FODMAPs are a group of short chain carbohydrates (sugars) that aren't completely absorbed by the small intestine and can cause digestive distress in some individuals, which is why it's occasionally recommended that they're avoided. These are:

Oligosaccharides: There are two types of oligosaccharides; fructans (wheat, some vegetables like garlic and onion) and galacto-oligosaccharides (mostly pulses, beans and legumes such as lentils).

Disaccharides: Lactose is a disaccharide found in dairy products.

Monosaccharides: Fructose, a monosaccharide, can be found in foods like honey, apples and high-fructose corn syrup.

Polyols: Sugar alcohols that are often used as sugar-free sweeteners (eg sorbitol and mannitol) and also found in some fruits and vegetables.

Most people can eat these foods with no issues, and in fact they're part of a healthy, diverse diet. However, those with sensitivities can experience cramping, bloating, gas/flatulence, diarrhoea or constipation after eating them. FODMAPS move slowly through the small intestine, attracting water, and are rapidly fermented in the large intestine by gut bacteria, producing gas. The extra gas and water can cause the intestinal wall to stretch and expand, which can cause digestive symptoms.

What is the low FODMAP diet?

A low FODMAP diet is an evidence-based diet. Unlike many 'fad' diets, it's supported by dietitians, with numerous studies highlighting its effectiveness in alleviating digestive discomfort. It follows three stages; Restrict, Reintroduce, Personalise.

You start by eliminating high FODMAP foods (also known as the elimination diet) for four to six weeks. Dietitians at the Gut Health Clinic recommend this is done alongside 15 minutes per day of meditation/mindfulness due to the strong gut-brain axis, the two way communication between your brain and gut.

> "The low FODMAP diet is supported by dietitians, with numerous studies highlighting its effectiveness in alleviating digestive discomfort"

If you have no symptom improvement after six weeks, then the Gut Health clinic team advice is to stop the diet and work with a dietitian/nutritionist for other symptom control.

On reintroducing the FODMAPs, they are best restarted gradually, adding them back in to your diet one by one. The Gut Health clinic team recommends adding roughly one-third of a normal portion and building up from there. The goal is to establish which FODMAPs cause symptoms so that they can be avoided or limited without the need to cut the whole range from our diet. Research has found that a low FODMAP diet can improve symptoms for 86% of people with IBS or SIBO (small bacterial intestinal overgrowth).

The full elimination diet is not designed to be followed long term, and personalising your diet will allow for more flexibility and variety with your foods. The low FODMAP diet has been specifically developed for people with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and should be done alongside help from an expert dietitian or nutritionist as the diet can be very restrictive – it's essential your diet continues to be nutritionally balanced.

Your dietitian or nutritionist will provide you with a list of foods to avoid but essentially you will be cutting out;

- Dairy-based milk, yoghurt and ice cream.
- Wheat-based products such as cereal, bread and crackers
- Beans and lentils
- Some vegetables, such as artichokes, asparagus, onions and garlic
- Some fruits, such as apples, cherries, pears and peaches

Instead, focus your meals and snacks on meat and eggs, gluten-free grains such as rice, quinoa and oats, certain vegetables and fruits, some cheeses and dairy-free milk alternatives.

Top takeaways

This is not a FODMAP-free diet; foods are low or high, so low FODMAP foods can still contain some!

This diet is not meant to be followed long term or without expert input to support you in maintaining a balanced, nutrient-dense diet, but removing irritants even for a short period of time can give your gut lining a chance to repair itself and help restore a healthy balance of gut flora, meaning that ultimately you can eat all the restricted foods again.

And one last note: make sure you watch out for portion sizes too, as eating smaller amounts can transform a high FODMAP food into a low FODMAP food that you may be able to tolerate.

Fermented foods

Words: Charlie Watson

Including fermented foods in your diet can be crucial in unlocking good gut health. And it's a lot easier than you might think!

Fermented foods are foods and drinks that have gone through controlled microbial growth and fermentation. It is an ancient technique for preserving foods and extending shelf life of seasonal foods.

Fermentation itself is the chemical breakdown or 'pre-digestion' of carbs (like sugar and starch) into alcohol or acids by bacteria and yeast. The alcohol and acids act as natural preservatives and create beneficial bacteria and enzymes, making fermented foods a good source of amino acids, vitamins and minerals.

There are three main methods of fermentation; Lactic acid fermentation (making sauerkraut, kimchi, yoghurt, sourdough etc), Ethanol fermentation (used to make beer and wine) and Acetic acid fermentation (creating kombucha and apple cider vinegar).

Strong foundations

These processes give fermented foods and drinks their unique tastes, textures and smells. While these foods and their benefits for our gut health have become increasingly popular over the past few years, fermentation has actually been around for hundreds of years to make products like cheese, sourdough bread and yoghurt.

Do it yourself!

If you are planning to ferment your own veggies, let them ferment longer if you like a more sour taste and a softer texture. For maximum digestive and nutritive benefits, allow your veggies to ferment for 21 days and eat them raw. Finished ferments should have a pH reading of 4.5 or lower.

FERMENTED FOODS TO TRY

Sauerkraut - pickled cabbage with a tangy taste, that originated in Central/Eastern Europe. Perfect added to soups or stews and is especially good served alongside meat or smoked fish.

Kimchi - similar to sauerkraut, this Korean shredded and pickled cabbage dish is usually on the spicy side. It can also be made with a range of veggies, including radish.

Benefits of fermented foods

The key advantage (other than taste) from adding fermented food to your diet is the beneficial bacteria for our gut health. Including fermented foods increases microbiome diversity, and can lower risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes when eaten as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Those with food intolerances may find fermented foods/drinks easier to tolerate as fermentation acts as the initial breakdown, and can improve absorption of beneficial nutrients

Studies have also shown an improvement in IBS symptoms, lessening the severity of bloating, gas, diarrhoea and constipation with regular consumption of fermented foods.

How to add fermented foods to your diet

Interested in adding fermented foods to your diet? Try adding them in slowly, a little at a time, as changes in your gut flora can cause some discomfort if you add too much too soon. You need to train your gut! Think about adding a tablespoon of sauerkraut or kimchi to a meal, or a small serving of kombucha instead of a soft drink each day until you make it a habit.

Are fermented foods good for everyone?

Not everyone will benefit from adding fermented foods to their diet. Those who struggle with histamine intolerance may have allergic reactions such as headaches or stomach issues, while people with digestive issues may experience bloating or flatulence. Pregnant women, children and those with compromised immune systems can eat fermented foods, but should avoid mould-based ferments and home-fermented products.

Kefir - a fermented milk drink made from cow, goat or sheep's milk and thought to originate from Eastern Europe. There are also non-dairy options made from coconut or almond milk, or water kefir.

Live yoghurt - milk that has been fermented with a live culture bacteria creating a tangy, creamy yoghurt. Look out for 'live' or 'active cultures' on labels and try to avoid any with added sugar.

Kombucha - tea that is a fizzy, tangy-flavoured cold drink. While sugar is needed for the fermentation process, avoid any with more than 10g sugar as it may be that sugar has been added after fermentation.

Exercise & your gut

Words: Emily Kier-Berendt

We all know regular exercise is good for heart and lungs, but did you also know it's great for your gut? Here's how it works...

Did you know we carry up to 2kg of tiny microorganisms in our bodies? These bacteria play a massive role in how we digest food, which then affects things like how we absorb nutrients, fight off infections, manage inflammation, balance hormones, and even boost our mental health. We know diet, stress, antibiotics, smoking and illness all have an impact on our gut health, but could exercise be another big player?

While there isn't definitive evidence to suggest that exercise on its own will positively impact your gut health, ensuring you take regular exercise alongside the other small changes in this magazine will have an overall positive effect on your health. Plus, increasing your exercise a little each week will not only transform your physical health, but it can work wonders on your mental health too, and both these things combined will help to combat gut issues.

Still, it's not as simple as 'move more = better gut.' Studies have found combining aerobic exercise (like running or swimming) with strength training (lifting weights) gave the best results for bacterial diversity.

The same review found moderate-to-high intensity workouts were more effective than gentler ones. Overdoing it, however, can harm gut health, so balance is crucial.

How often should you exercise for gut benefits? Studies suggest 30 minutes, at least three times a week, for eight weeks or more. Consistency is key! But exercise on its own isn't a magic bullet. For best results, pair it with a healthy diet, good sleep and plenty of self-care. After all, your gut is worth looking after.

What benefits will exercise have on your gut?

- **Boosts** gut bacteria diversity
- **Balances** bacteria types, which could help with weight and gut issues like IBS.
- **Encourages** bacteria that produce short-chain fatty acids, which reduce inflammation and fuel your colon.
- **Supports** bacteria that thrive on lactic acid (produced when you exercise).
- **Improves** blood flow and digestion, reducing bloating and discomfort.
- **Lowers** inflammation, helping maintain a healthy gut.

Great ideas to UP YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise doesn't have to be boring! The trick is to find something that you enjoy, and that way you're more likely to stick at it. Don't fork out on a gym membership if you prefer to be outside, and don't sign up to exercise classes if you prefer your own company – try a few things on for size and find out which one fits you and your life the best.

AEROBIC EXERCISE

Walking briskly or cycling to or from work instead of public transport (or get off one stop early and walk the rest of the way).

Lunch-time walk – pop it in your diary to make it a non-negotiable.

Sign up to a group sport – one you've tried before, or something completely new – what about padel?

Join a running club – they're often suited for all abilities and, if you've never run before, you can choose one that's for beginners.

If you're a more experienced runner, sign up to a race and follow a running plan – it's a great way to hold yourself accountable.

Try something new with a friend like yoga, pilates or swimming – all are fantastic for cardiovascular health, and you'll also reap the social benefits of doing them with a friend.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Following an online strength programme – there are loads of free ones on YouTube; just pick and choose until you find one that suits you best.

Join a strength class at the gym – especially if you find it hard to stick to a routine by yourself.

Buy a few weights to workout at home – if it's tricky to get to the gym, but again, put your strength training in the diary.

Get a personal trainer/coach – even if it's just once every few months. They will show you how to use your gym equipment and set realistic goals for you.

Stress and your gut

Words: Fiona Horsfield

We are aware that stress, anxiety and worry can have adverse effects on our digestive system, but why is that the case?

Many people have noticed that their body reacts to stress in different ways, and that the gut is often one of the first things to let you know if you are feeling anxious – whether it's that extra toilet trip before a big meeting, or stomach cramps before a night out.

What is stress

In response to a stressful situation, our body is programmed to respond in a 'fight or flight' way – either stay and 'fight' the threat or to run away from the threat – the 'flight.' We are probably all aware that our heart races, our breathing quickens and often we become sweaty when we are feeling anxious, which is all part of our body's preparation to run away. This occurs as the brain triggers the production of hormones in the body in response to stress which primes the heart, lungs and muscles, and allows a release of energy into the body.

> "Stress hormones can have an effect on the immune system in the gut, which can affect our body's ability to fend off infection"

Stress and our gut

The change in levels of stress hormones can have wide reaching effects across our body on lots of different parts, with some unpleasant, or unwanted consequences.

The stress hormones can affect gut motility (how well the gut moves our food waste along). This process can be sped up to cause cramping and diarrhoea, or in some people it slows it down which leads to bloating, pain and constipation.

The stress hormones can also have an effect on the immune system in the lining of the gut, which can affect our body's ability to fend off infection. This can also reduce our ability to absorb nutrients from the food that we eat. Being stressed can leave us feeling tired, worn down and more susceptible to infections. Over time our body's ability to absorb nutrients and our healthy levels of vitamins and minerals are reduced.

Stress could also cause a disruption in the delicate balance of our natural gut microbiome, which can influence how our tummy feels and behaves.

Stress and appetite

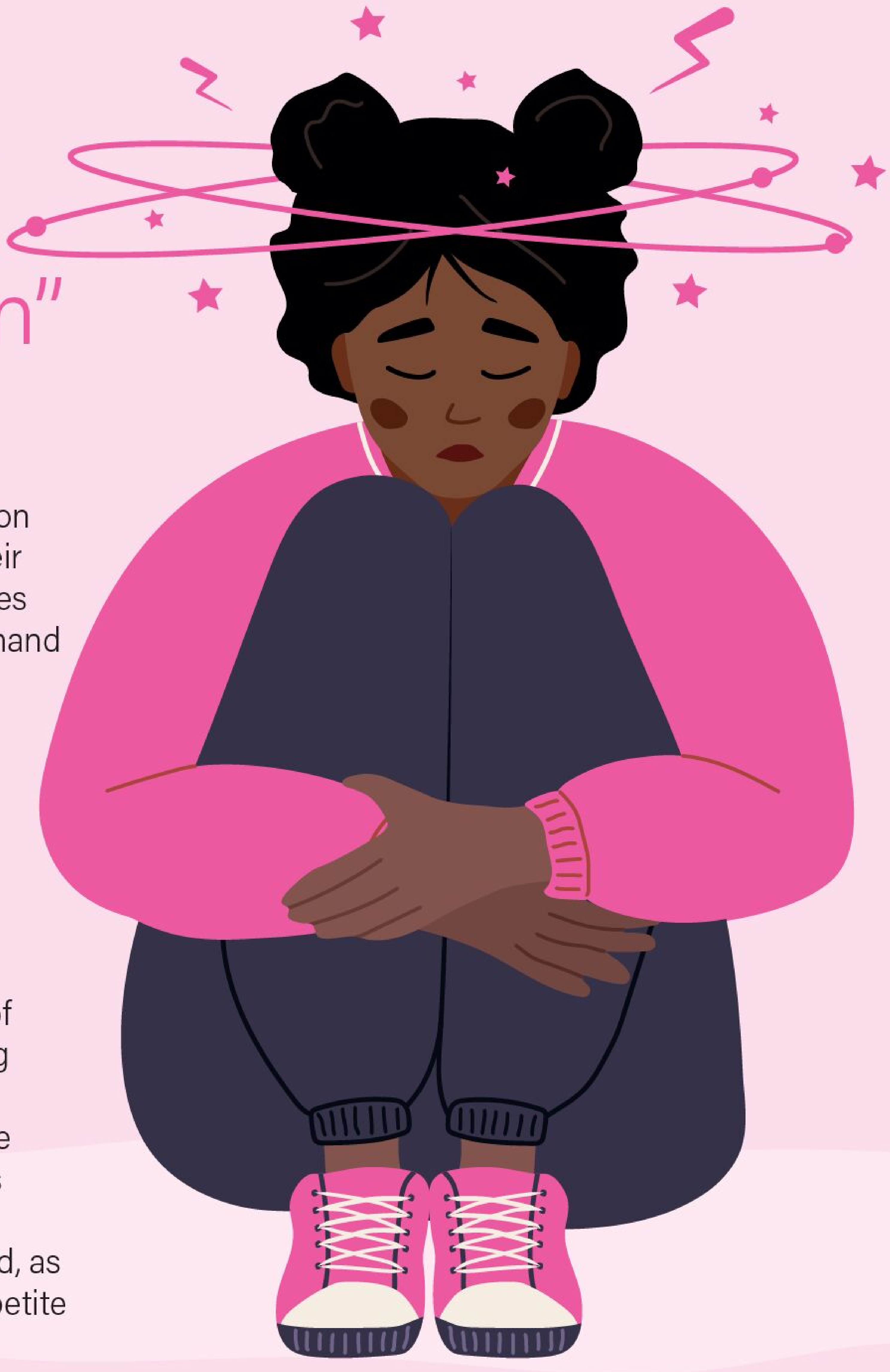
Being stressed can have an effect on our appetite. Some people lose their appetite initially and find themselves unable to eat at all. The body's demand for energy and the preparation for this 'fight or flight' means that the desire to eat can disappear. The parasympathetic 'rest and digest' part of the nervous system is turned down low, so our appetite may just disappear.

Some people might find that they lose weight during a period of stress. While others find that using up the energy stores in response to the stressful situation can cause an increase in appetite. The stress hormones work to release more energy from stores in the body and, as these stores are depleted, our appetite is triggered to restock.

Food and stress

During a period of stress, the types of food that we crave can change, and we often make unhealthier choices, reaching for foods high in sugar or fat. Ultra-processed foods such as ready meals, or snacks, such as crisps, biscuits and cakes contain ingredients we don't use in home cooking, such as sweeteners, additives and preservatives. It's thought that ultra-processed foods can upset the natural gut biome and its impact on a healthy functioning gut.

We can change the composition



of our microbiome within only days of changes in our eating habits. Equally, we can reverse the composition quickly with many things such as poor lifestyle choices, alcohol and antibiotics.

Eating a wide range of foods that supports the gut biome and provides us with a full range of nutrients is important, in particular, eating a healthier, more balanced range of foods.

Serotonin and microbes

Serotonin is a hormone that has influence on our emotions and mood. Microbes in the gut have been linked with the production of serotonin and they may have an impact on our mood. We can boost our levels in our diet by eating foods that naturally contain this hormone, such as pineapples and tomatoes.

Tryptophans are amino acids that can turn into serotonin and are found in protein-rich food. A whole range of nutrients, vitamins and minerals are required for the process of serotonin production, so by combining eating food containing tryptophans with a healthy diet could improve our mental health.

We need to try and eat foods in their whole and unprocessed form to maximise the benefits of the nutrients available to us. These are positive changes that could have a further benefit of improving our mental health.

Moderate exercise encourages the release of 'happy hormones' such as serotonin, adrenaline and dopamine, which together can improve our mood. This is in addition to endorphins, the body's natural 'feel good' chemicals. During exercise, stress hormones are reduced and the feel-good hormones increase. This can contribute to what is known as the 'runner's high.'

If you are constantly feeling 'stressed' and can't identify a trigger, it could be that you are suffering from anxiety. A lot can be done to help and there are resources available which you can access easily online to help. Talking to your GP may also be a good starting point.

Physical effects of stress

If we are experiencing frequent stress, or 'chronic stress,' our stress hormones are continually firing and this can cause longer lasting damage to our body. Stress can have an impact on our night's sleep and this disruption to our natural sleep cycle can also have a knock-on effect to our digestive system.

And it's worth remembering, we may rely on caffeine when stressed, or if we are tired, and caffeine can trigger our bowels to be more active than normal.

Top tips to...
REDUCE STRESS

Understanding the trigger points that bring on stress is just as important as tackling the end result. Follow these simple tips to battle stress head on.

Identify the cause. Sometimes it's obvious what the trigger is – for instance, moving house or starting a new job, but sometimes it's not clear. Knowing what is causing us to feel stressed can help us prepare for these days.

Talk about it with friends, family or trained professionals.

Take regular exercise. It can have such positive mental health benefits and natural endorphins which improve our mood are released. There is also some evidence to suggest that it can improve gut health!

Try and get quality sleep in a good, regular routine.

Break down challenges into small achievable goals. It's easy to be overwhelmed when stressed.

Try and eat healthily across a broad range of foods, including lots of fruit and vegetables.

Reduce the amount of ultra-processed foods you consume.

Reduce the amount of refined sugar found in a lot of 'convenience' foods.

Try to avoid using alcohol or drugs as your go-to coping mechanism.

Consider breathing exercises to help relax and switch off the stress cycle.

Take a break from social media and the news.

Sleep and your gut

Words: Fiona Horsfield

The quantity and quality of sleep we average per night has huge repercussions on our gut health. Let's find out more

Sleeping well is key to being healthy. If we have a good sleep pattern and start the day well rested, the hormones that regulate our metabolism and body systems are in balance and function most effectively.

Conversely, poor sleep can have an effect not only on our general day-to-day well-being and quality of life, but poor sleepers have been found to have an increased risk of obesity and high blood pressure.

You might not expect that your gut health has much to do with your sleep, but it's now emerging that the links between our brain and our gut are very important. Our body clock, what we eat and even the bacteria in our gut, can all influence our gut health through their effect on sleep. Having an understanding of this can help us make good lifestyle choices to improve our gut and our sleep.

> Most of the serotonin and melatonin in our body is actually produced by special cells that line the gut.

Circadian rhythm

The hypothalamus in the brain hosts our circadian 'clock', which controls our daily cycles such as sleep, the digestion of food, and our appetite. We are programmed to naturally want to fall asleep when it is dark, and be awake when it is light. The clock is very sensitive and can be affected by lots of factors such as what and when we eat, how much exercise we take, our temperature and our social life.

The ideal amount of time to sleep is between 6-9 hours for optimal health.

Food for sleep

Certain foods and drinks can promote better sleep by providing nutrients essential to sleep. Healthy foods such as kiwi, cherries, milk, fatty fish, nuts and rice have been found to aid in relaxation and sleep, but remember, everything in moderation!

If there is a disruption in the circadian rhythm, we can find it really difficult to fall asleep at 'normal' times, which can result in a restless night. This can make us feel very tired during the day and can result in making less mindful choices.

Microbes in the gut

Not only do us humans have a circadian rhythm, but the microbes that live in our digestive tract also have their own. The numbers and variety of microbes in our gut can change depending on many factors, including the types of food we eat and when we eat it. This can have a huge effect on our sleep.

Serotonin & melatonin

The hormones serotonin and melatonin are also linked with sleep. Melatonin helps regulate our biological clock and is key in promoting good sleep, helping our body know when to fall asleep and when to wake up. It is thought that the microbes can have an impact on the brain's response to melatonin.

The production of serotonin can be influenced by many factors, including what we eat and the gut microbes present. The microbes may have a very important role in how much serotonin – the 'happy' hormone – our body produces.

The vagus nerve controls the production of hormones such as melatonin and serotonin from the intestine. Some microorganisms can produce chemicals which can act on the nerve and could influence the production of these hormones.

The microbes can also interact with the immune cells that line the gut wall. This can affect how our brain functions and how sleep is regulated.

The importance of good quality sleep cannot be understated. A good sleep pattern is essential for our brain, body, health and even the microbes resident in our gut, whose important role we are just beginning to understand.

BAD NIGHT?
Do less of this...

Keep an eye on your alcohol and caffeine intake for optimum sleep

Alcohol Drinking alcohol regularly can also lead to insomnia and can wipe out lots of the beneficial microbes that line the gut. Many people report restlessness after drinking alcohol and how it negatively affects the quality of their sleep.

Caffeine We are a nation of tea and coffee drinkers, and a lot of us rely on a cuppa (or two!) in the morning to get us going. Small amounts of caffeine are not harmful, and in fact can have some positive health benefits. In fact, there have been some studies that suggest that coffee can help promote good microbes in the bowel as well, which is good news when our sleep has not been as good as hoped! However, as caffeine is a stimulant, too much can be detrimental for our night's sleep and we can find it difficult to fall asleep if we have consumed too much during the day.

GOOD NIGHT!
Do more of this...

Knowing what you put into your body can have a positive effect on your sleep

What to eat for good sleep

Eating lots of vegetables and grains rich in fibre will help to support a wide range of gut microbes which have positive effects on our health. Healthy fats are also essential, such as those found in olive oils and fish, as these can also promote healthy gut microbes. Gut microbes can affect how we metabolise carbohydrates such as pasta, bread and cereals.

An amino-acid called tryptophan found in high in foods naturally high in protein can be converted into serotonin and melatonin, and has been linked to helping with sleep. Try chicken, eggs, yoghurt, peanuts, tofu and bananas for a tryptophan boost.

Milk also contains melatonin and tryptophans – a mug of warm milk before bed may make you feel sleepy.

Have an evening snack of grapes and strawberries for the melatonin that is found naturally in these fruits. And avoid drinking too much water in the evening to avoid unwanted bathroom trips! But, crucially, make sure you are drinking enough during the day to avoid waking with thirst.

It's also a good idea to eat earlier in the day, with the evening meal at least two hours before bedtime.

Sleep Hygiene checklist

Getting a good night's sleep makes a huge difference to your wellbeing, and can directly impact your gut health. The good news is that there are plenty of things you can do to get a better night's sleep, every night. Remember: consistency is key!

AM
ALARM
07:00

1

Have a consistent pattern and stick to it. Help your body clock by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, including the weekend.

2

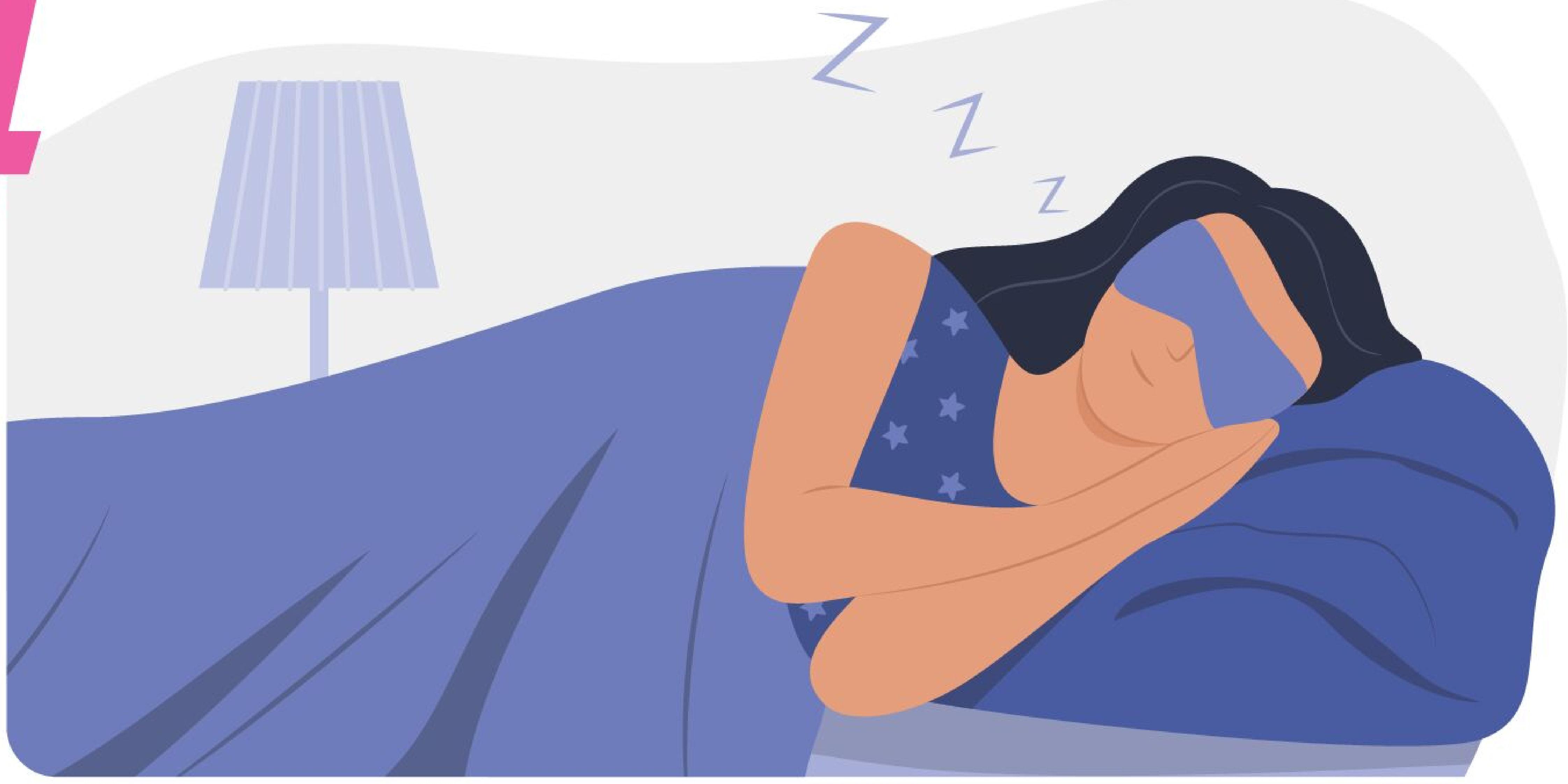
Create a bedtime routine. Let your brain know that sleep comes next by setting your own wind-down ritual. Have a bath, read a book, listen to music; whatever calms and relaxes you. Try meditation or relaxation exercises to help you nod off.

3

Go screen-free – no more scrolling social media right before bed. Avoid screens of any sort for at least two hours, and that includes television. Keep the tech out of the bedroom. Blue light from screens stops the brain's release of the sleep hormone melatonin.

4

Set the scene. A cool, dark, quiet and tidy bedroom creates a perfect environment to sleep in. Make your bedroom a sanctuary for sleep. That might mean getting blackout blinds, an eye mask or ear plugs and moving your work desk to another location in your house.



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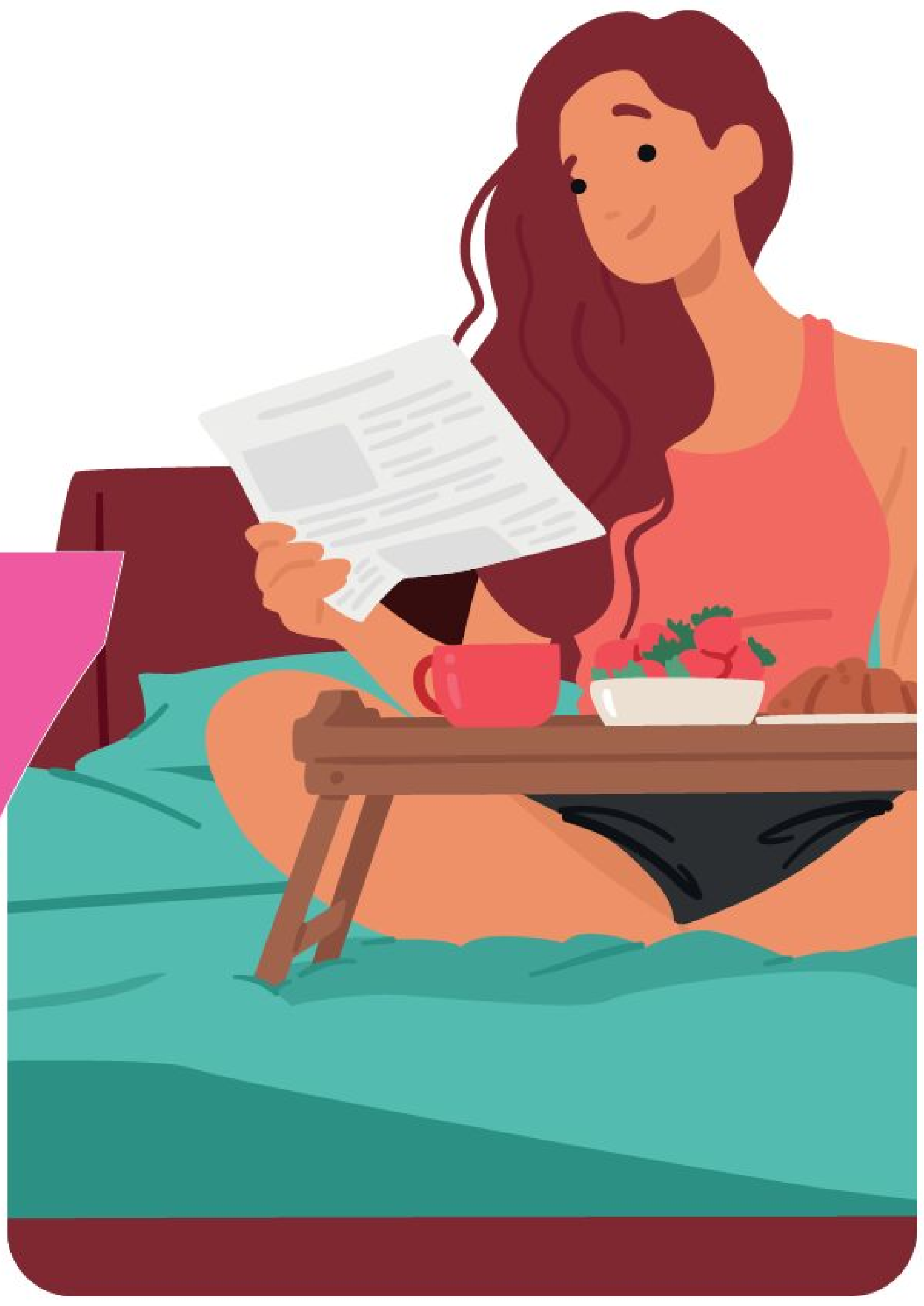
Empty your head. If your brain just has too many tabs open, try writing your thoughts down. Use a journal or piece of paper, it doesn't matter. Taking them out of your head and putting them onto paper can help you to relax and stop worrying.

6

Avoid stimulants. Caffeine makes you feel alert but it can stay in your system for more than six hours. Try having your last caffeinated drink (that includes coffee, tea, hot chocolate and Coke) before 2pm. High sugar loads can be stimulating too, so avoid reaching for sweets before bed.



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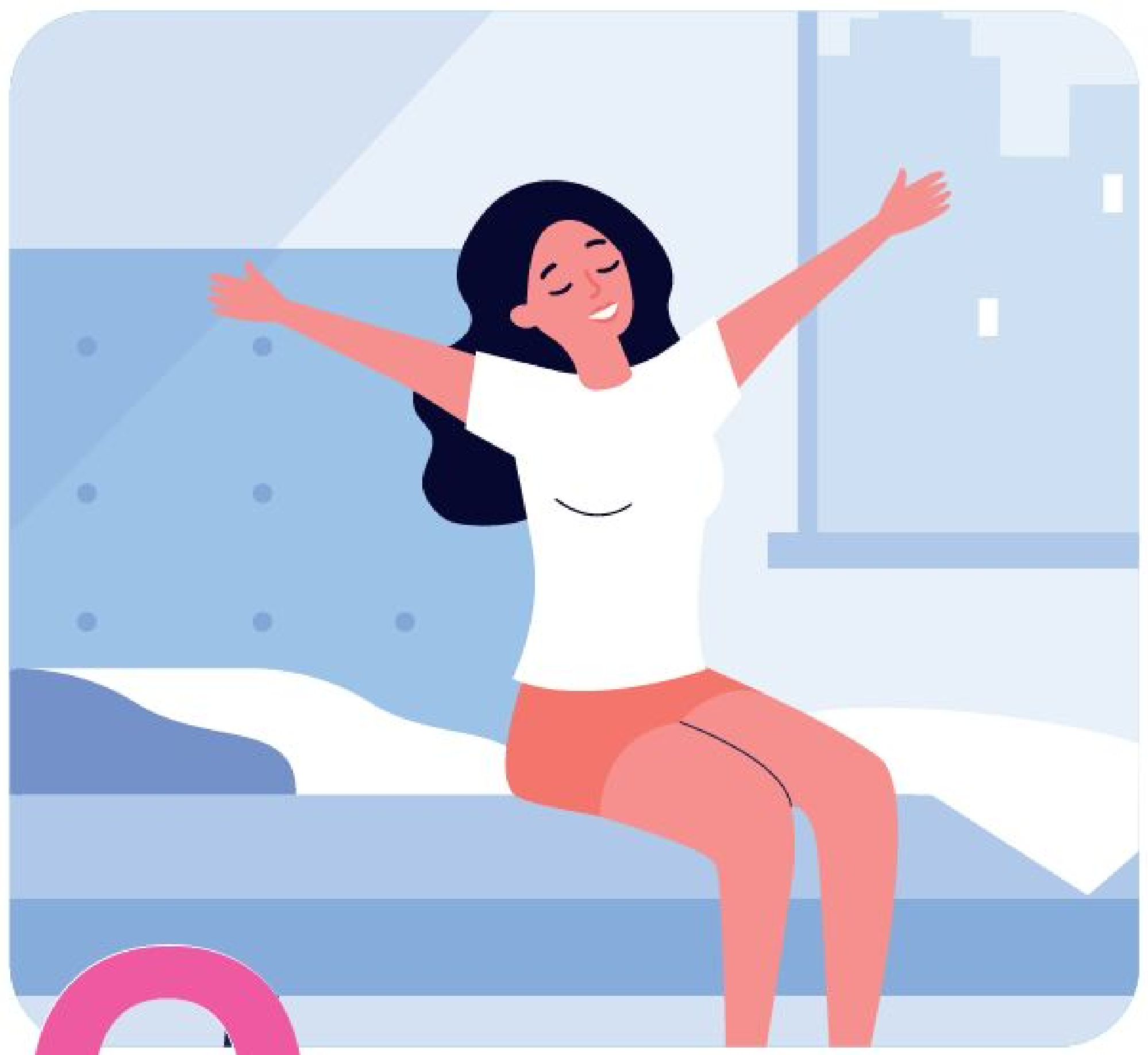
Allow for digestion. Digestion is an active process, so going to bed too soon after a meal might keep you awake, particularly if you've eaten fatty or spicy foods. While an evening glass of wine is nice, remember that alcohol is known to disrupt and lighten sleep.



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Get morning daylight. Studies have shown that exposure to daylight, especially first thing in the morning, can help set your circadian rhythms and make you sleep better at night. You can't get this through glass so sit outside or take a walk before you start your day.

9

Exercise your way to sleep. There's very good evidence that people who exercise regularly have fewer sleep problems. This is due to much more than just being physically tired; it helps your mental health and social health too. Finding something you enjoy is the key. Beware of exercising too late in the evening though; a morning or lunchtime slot is far better.

Female health & your gut

Words: Renee McGregor

Hormonal health has been shown to have a direct link with our gut health. So how can we look after both?

There are many factors that impact the gut microbiome through adult life, as we've discovered. These include environmental conditions, stress levels, activity levels, and even the type of exercise we do. Genetic, ethnic and even our body mass index can all influence our gut biome. But one other factor that appears to be instrumental in determining our gut biome are hormones.

The fact is that women experience more impaired gut function such as gastroparesis, constipation and irritable bowel syndrome than men. So why is this? It's worth getting to grips with our hormones as well as our guts to make sure we've got all the info at hand – let's get into it.

During periods

The part of the microbiome that influences female hormones is known as the estrobolome. This includes bacteria that are capable of metabolising oestrogen and impacting how much of it we retain in our bodies, and also how much we get rid of.

The estrobolome produces a hormone called beta-glucuronidase that frees bound oestrogen leaving our body via bowel movements and makes it available for reabsorption into our circulation.

Things like exercising too much and eating too little can result in 'dysbiosis' – changes to our gut bacteria – which can impact the production of oestrogen in the body and result in changes or irregularities in your period.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

There is a complex exchange of bacteria and other microorganisms from mother to child, even before birth. This prepares the newborn's immune system to face the outside world. Each individual acquires at birth his or her own personal gut microbiota, which is an integral part of their defence mechanisms. Studies have shown that there is a big difference between the microbiome of an infant born via caesarean section versus natural vaginal delivery. Similarly, whether a newborn is breastfed or bottle fed also impacts the diversity of flora in the gut, with a more favourable environment in breastfed babies. It's been suggested that genetic 'imprinting'

of the gut microbiota happens in these very early years, and this then determines our health into adulthood, including our predisposition toward certain diseases.

So while we can continue to influence our gut health into our adult years, the microbiome we develop in our early years may be of more importance.

Menopause

Research suggests that the production of oestrogen and the gut biome are a bi-directional process; which means that oestrogen influences the gut biome but equally, the gut biome impacts the production of oestrogen.

During perimenopause and then menopause, oestrogen levels start to decline and eventually is stopped being produced all together. This has a direct impact on the production of certain bacteria in the gut biome, which can lead to further dysbiosis during this period of life. And it's this dysbiosis that could actually be the root of some of the symptoms most commonly associated with menopause such as hot flushes and night sweats.

Our microbiome has a huge part to play in our health on many levels. And it's worth paying special attention to all the advice here if you are in perimenopause and beyond, as women need to be specially attentive as hormones and our microbiome are closely related and can impact each other. Meaning that if we look after our gut, we are also looking after our hormones, and our all-round wellbeing.

Sex & your gut health

Words: Fiona Horsfield

Could the health of our gut be connected to our sex life? Let's find out

Sexual health is complex. It is so much more than actual sex itself, and there are many factors that can be a turn on – and a turn off.

According to the World Health Organisation: 'Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.'

It highlights the highly complex nature of sexuality and many systems that can help – or hinder – a healthy sex life. And to add into the mix, the microbes in our gut may have a role to play!

We have a good understanding now that there is a two-way communication between the brain and the gut. The brain sends signals to the gut, which in turn can send signals back. We also know that hormones may have a role to play in regulating the composition of the gut microbiome. The gut microbiome may also influence different hormone levels at different stages.

Added to all this, we know that fluctuations in the gut microbes can have impacts on the levels of serotonin and dopamine neurotransmitters (among others) in the brain. These chemicals are connected to sexual desire.

There appears to be an association between having a healthy, diverse range of microbes and with the level of sexual desire and also having a healthy active sex life.

Hormones

Hormones have a major role to play in our libido. Sex hormones such as oestrogen and testosterone, and neurotransmitters such as oxytocin and dopamine help to control libido.

Oestrogen has a role in keeping our

tissues plump and well lubricated, and can make sex more pleasurable. But sexual desire, or libido, is not just a physical thing and can be affected by so many external factors. It is something that fluctuates over time, depending on what else is going on in life. Poor sleep quality, menopause, our diet and stress can play havoc with energy levels and this in turn can affect sexual desire.

In particular, poor sleep can have a drastic effect on reducing libido. The gut microbiota can also be affected through this disruption in sleep, and this could have an effect on the hormones and neurotransmitters produced and make the sleep problems ever worse.

Inflammation

Inflammation occurs when the body reacts to a potential invader, and is one of its strongest defence mechanisms. It has the ability to allow the body to heal, but also has the potential to cause damage within the body. It can also have an effect on the microbes in our gut.

When our levels of inflammation are higher than normal, there are reports of reduced sexual satisfaction among both men and women. Sexual desire can also be influenced by levels of inflammation in the body.

Some people suffer from specific inflammatory disorders that affect the bowel itself, such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. This can have an effect on nutrient absorption and diversity of gut microbes.

Conditions

Various conditions can also have an effect on our libido and sexual desire. Bowel disorders which can cause bloating, diarrhoea, flatulence, abdominal pain and even incontinence can all make us feel self-conscious or worried about what may happen when getting intimate.

How we feel about ourselves and our body image perception can really affect our self-esteem and can have a huge impact on how we feel about being intimate with our partner.

Some medications that we take for medical conditions can have an effect on our stomach, for example some people suffer from diarrhoea when using diabetes medication. If you are being treated for a condition and you are not happy with the side effects, then don't be afraid to speak to your doctor or nurse in case there are alternative ways to manage your problems.

Probiotics

What about supplements? Can we take something to boost our gut health – and our libido?

There are many different types of probiotics, and one that could be helpful for one problem may not be helpful for another. Be hesitant at reaching for the capsules promising libido-boosting potential through probiotics. That said, combining probiotics in yoghurt, kefir and fermented foods with a healthy diet can do wonders for your gut microbiome.

And while we don't yet have a handle on the exact benefits the different foods may have on improving different health conditions, making little changes to our diet and lifestyle all adds up – and can even enhance our sex life.

Gut issues & sexual health

Get plenty of rest: If you are sleeping well, then your circadian rhythm is in balance. And you'll have more energy for alternative bedtime activities!

Monitor stress levels: Stress wears your mind and body down. It's hard to switch off and enjoy sex when feeling highly strung. Consider relaxation techniques with your partner such as having a bath or enjoying a massage.

Take regular exercise to boost your mood and energy levels. Exercise naturally releases your feel-good chemicals – endorphins – and the 'happy hormones' such as serotonin. Even more are released during an orgasm, so it's a win-win situation!

Eat a wide range of healthy foods to give your body the best chance possible, and this could work to potentially boost your libido.

Let's go Shopping

We've rounded up a few of our favourite foods and supplements to help you with your first gut-friendly food shop

NO ADDED SUGAR
Bio & Me
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT*
MUESLI
SUPER NUTTY
HIGH IN FIBRE • PLANT-BASED DIVERSITY • VEGAN FRIENDLY

Bio & Me Super Nutty Muesli

From £3.65 / www.bioandme.co.uk

This breakfast classic is a celebration of wholesome, plant-based ingredients. Packed with 13 diverse plant-based foods including the likes of hearty wholegrain oats, almonds, cashews, and Brazil nuts, it's a gut-loving treat that's as nutritious as it is delicious.. It tastes proper lush too!

PLUS
NEW 8 PACK
Yakult
20 billion friendly L. casei Shirota bacteria

Yakult Plus

From £3.70 for a pack of 8 / www.yakult.co.uk

Like all Yakult products, Yakult Plus is bursting with 20 billion friendly bacteria, scientifically proven to reach the gut alive, but in addition, it also contains fibre that can feed the bacteria in the gut. The fermented milk drink is also rich in vitamin C, which supports the immune system and helps lower fatigue – a further boost to well-being.

Microbz

From 23.50 / www.microbz.co.uk

Microbz is a range of beneficial bacteria, targeting everything from digestive health to women's health. Each of them contains a 100% natural probiotic with 15 different strains of bacteria in every shot. It comes in a liquid formula to ensure the bacteria make it to your gut and are well absorbed.

microbz
immunity
Supports resilience

Jamu Wild Water

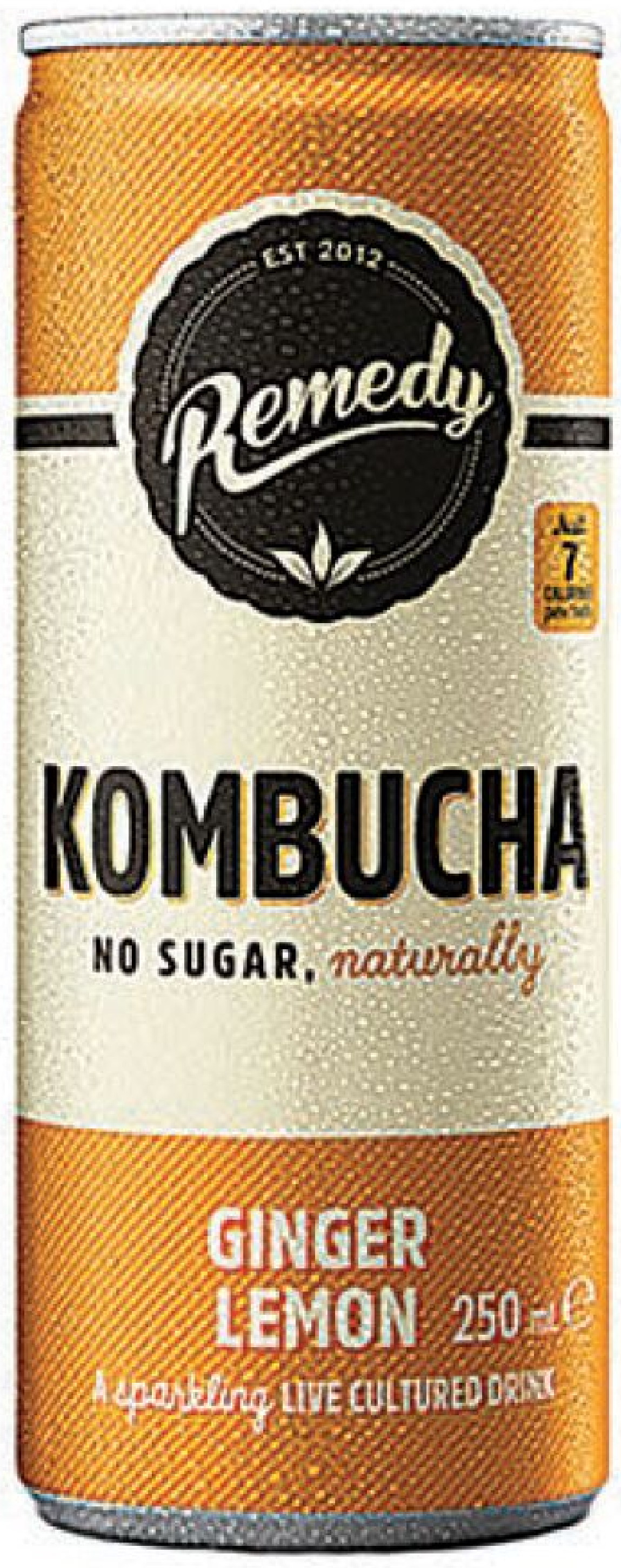
£40 for 24 cans / jamuwildwater.co.uk

A refreshing way to up your fibre without chewing your way through a bunch of roughage. With three flavours and zero sugar, each 250ml can contains 5g prebiotic fibre in the form of chicory root inulin. Available in raspberry, bloody orange and lemon, Jamu is a delicious way to increase your fibre intake without the fuss.

Yeo Valley Gut Boost shots

£1.25 / www.yeovalley.co.uk

These tasty shots offer a convenient, daily boost of organic, nutrient-dense kefir with fibre in a super easy-to-drink 150ml bottle. Available in delicious varieties of Mango & Lime and Mixed Berries, each bottle has 14 strains of live cultures with billions of live bacteria.



Remedy Ginger Lemon Kombucha

£2.19 / www.remedydrinks.com

Naturally containing no sugar, Remedy's Kombucha is packed full of friendly bacteria. Brewed for 30 days using a traditional fermentation technique, this delicious drink is non-alcoholic, vegan as well as sugar-free. It makes for a fantastic mixer too, with a fiery ginger kick!

Zoe Daily 30+

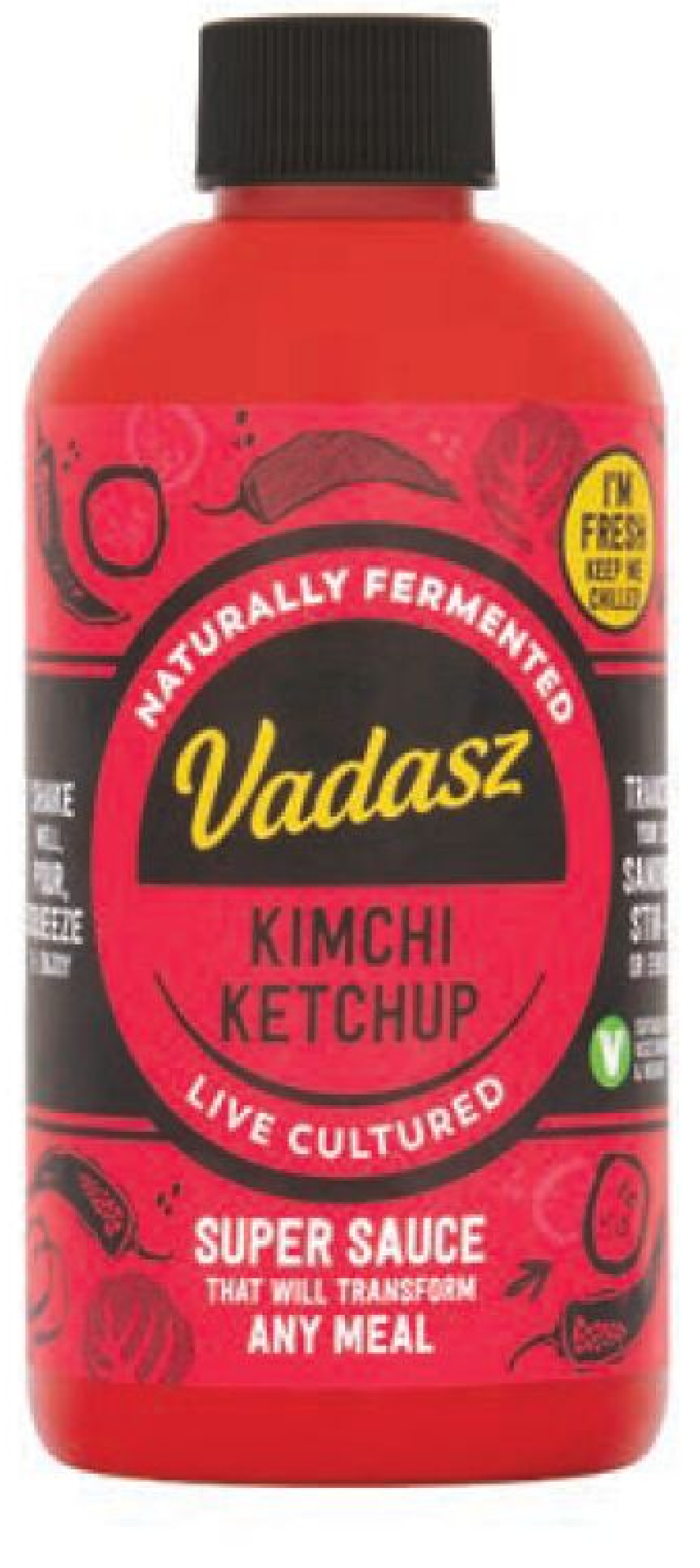
£13.50 / www.zoe.com

Yes it's a supplement, but not as you'd know it: Daily 30+ is a whole food supplement that enables you to add over 30 plants to your pantry, while complementing everyday meals. A super tasty mix of seeds, vegetables, nuts, whole grains and spices, sprinkle Daily 30+ over breakfasts, salads and stews for a tasty fibre-rich addition.

Biotiful Gut Health Original Kefir Yogurt

£2.10 / www.biotifulguthealth.com

An easy switch for your usual yogurt, Biotiful's kefir is crafted by fermenting low-fat milk with live cultures. It's packed with naturally healthy nutrients supporting gut health and immunity, with no sugar added. Heap onto granola, swirl through curries, or mix with berries for a scrumptious snack.



Vadaz Kimchi Ketchup

£4.50 / www.vadazsupersauces.co.uk

Now here's an easy way to add a splash of spicy flavour while keeping the whole family happy! This naturally fermented, live cultured sauce aims to transform every meal from salads to burgers, giving everything a dash of kimchi in the proceedings, and is suitable for veggies and vegans too.

Now what?

Congratulations!
You've taken the first step in improving your gut health and safeguarding your future wellbeing.
But now you've done that, what next?

Deciding to take positive action to improve your gut health is the first, and most important, step to improving your future health. Beginning to tick off those boxes on page 86 is the second step in the process – so if you've started to do that, then you're well on the way.

However, the third step is the trickiest, because this is where hard work comes in. This is where it all comes together, and this one is *consistency*.

As with any health programme, the only thing that will make positive change is if you stick at it. So, with this magazine, what we're encouraging you to do is to try as many of these 30 things as you possibly can over 30 days. It might be that not all of them stick the first time round, and that's absolutely fine. Just because you didn't manage that third 30-minute walk this week doesn't mean it's game over – just pick it up next week. If you stick at it, what you'll begin to see is that with a bit of habit-stacking (taking your water bottle on your walk, for instance), not only will it be easy to achieve everything we've set out, but you'll also begin to see results very quickly.

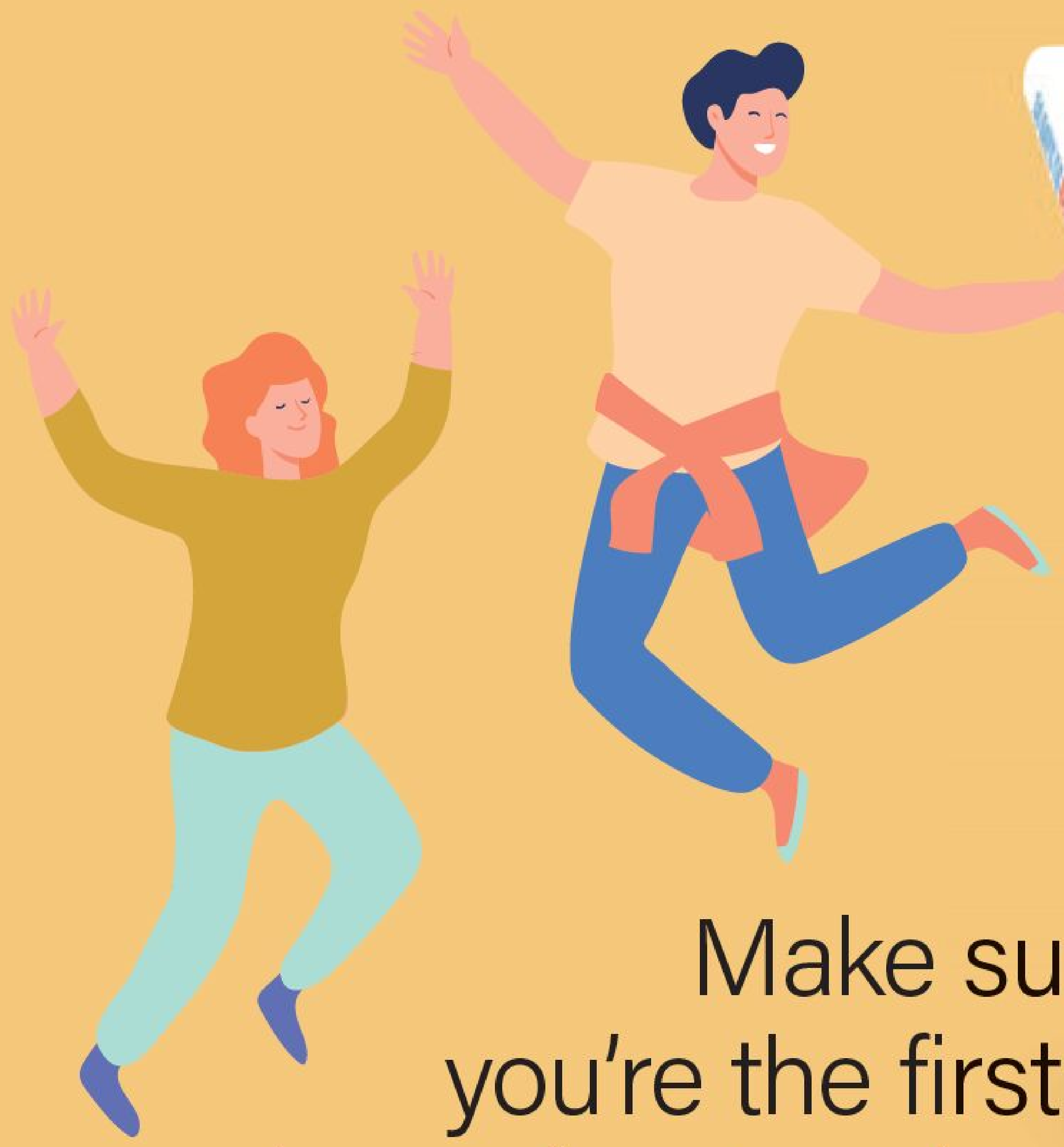
Introducing these very simple things into your life will enable you to sleep better, to have more energy, beat that bloat, and to feel healthier and happier than ever. Good luck, and see you in 30 Days!

NEXT ISSUE

In our next issue, we will discover how to reduce inflammation with *30 Days To... an Anti-Inflammatory Diet*. Look out for it wherever you buy your magazines.

30
DAYS TO

STAY UP TO DATE!



NEW!
30 DAYS TO
Better Gut Health
Your day-by-day guide to healing & nourishing your body
TAKE CONTROL of your long-term health
6 SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY GUT
The science behind the symptoms
TRANSFORM YOUR BODY FROM THE INSIDE-OUT
+ Improve sleep + Beat stress + Boost energy
Including 30 GUT-FRIENDLY RECIPES
Microbiome-boosting meals
Simple sugar replacements
Fermented food for all the family
Easy ways to pack in fibre

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GOOD. MOOD. BOOST!
FEAT. 14 STRAINS OF LIVE CULTURES + FIBRE
NEW!
Yeo Valley
ORGANIC
GUT BOOST
MANGO & LIME
KEFIR + FIBRE
14 LIVE CULTURES
KEFIR
STRAWBERRY
KEFIR
MANGO & PASSION FRUIT
KEFIR
NATURAL
YEO GOT THIS!

FIND YOUR DAILY GROOVE WITH YEO VALLEY ORGANIC KEFIR

Available at Ocado, Sainsbury's and Waitrose.
Subject to availability.